

PREPARING FOR A CREATIVE MARRIAGE:
PREMARITAL PREPARATION WITH RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES

A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the School of Theology
at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Harvey Richard Kemp
May 1982

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This professional project, completed by

Harvey Richard Kemp,

*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As this project is completed it marks the end of four years of intensive continuing education for me. It seems appropriate to pause and thank some of the people who have been a part of this experience. All of these persons have contributed to this project or to bringing me to the point of the completion.

First, I must thank Dr. Howard Clinebell, who encouraged me to enter this program and who has opened so many doors for me. Seldom is one able to identify the persons who have molded her or his thought, but the ways in which Dr. Clinebell has shaped my ministry are unmistakable. My entire ministry is different because of what he has taught me through his classes and his writings. But even more importantly, my life is different because of what I have learned from him as a person.

One of the great delights of this project was that it afforded me the opportunity to work closely with Dr. Dan Rhoades. Dr. Rhoades' combination of insights into theology and ethics were major shaping forces in the rethinking of my theology of marriage. This section, and others, could not have been completed without his help. But most of all, I treasure Dan's humanness and his openness to share with me who he is. As he struggled with his life I found new encouragement to struggle with mine.

There are several ministerial colleagues I would like to thank. Most especially I would like to thank Dr. Robert Bjorklund, who first encouraged me to enter this program and whose related interests encouraged me more than he can know. Second, I would like to thank the Reverend David Lehmborg, and his wife, Rachael Lehmborg, who worked with me on the original workshop that launched this project and convinced me, through the example of their own marriage, that reconstituted family marriages can be great. And finally, I would like to thank my dear friend, Dr. John Nagel, who encouraged me to follow my dream, wrote letters of recommendation for me, and who supported me with his friendship even though we were often many miles apart.

I would like to thank the members of the Westmont United Methodist Church and the couples who participated in the testing and evaluation of the design. The Westmont congregation not only allowed me the time to do the research for this project, but rejoiced with me as we moved together through the various stages from research to conclusion. This loving congregation sensed the importance of this research and their encouragement made this project a joy rather than a burden.

Two of the unsung heros (or heroines, as the case may be) are the proofreader and the typist. I would like to thank Dick Denton for his contribution and Shirley Reagan for typing the final manuscript.

Finally, I must thank my family. My father-in-law, L. D. Russell, and my sister-in-law, Kathleen Russell, have been very supportive and understanding of the demands made upon our entire family. I want to thank my parents, Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Kemp, who, although they have been deceased for many years, have given me so much. And to the late Dorothy Jean Russell, who always encouraged me to continue my formal education, I can only say that I wish you were here to share this moment with us. My wife, Christine, and my two daughters, Deanna and Kathy, were asked to give up far too much, but they gave willingly that I might have the time and the money for this period of intensive continuing education.

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ABSTRACT

This project comes as the combination of two concerns: the need for increased skills of pastors doing premarital preparation and the need for an increased awareness on the part of pastors of the unique problems faced by reconstituted families. (A reconstituted family is here defined as a family in which one or both adults is a step-parent.)

To address these concerns this project attempts to do four things: first, to delineate some of the unique problems faced by reconstituted families as the parents enter a new marriage and to offer a conceptual framework for understanding the process through which those families move. Second, to struggle with a theology of marriage which takes seriously the need to struggle with a theology of divorce and remarriage. Third, to design a process of four premarital preparation sessions and a fifth session to take place three to six months after the wedding. And fourth, to use and evaluate the premarital preparation design with couples in a local church.

This project offers specific suggestions and a detailed design for doing premarital preparation with those who have been previously divorced or widowed and their spouses who will have children or teenagers living in their home and for those noncustodial parents whose

children will visit on a regular or occational basis. Limited attention is given to the problems of those step-parents whose offspring are mature adults.

Specific suggestions are made for enhancing sex life, improving communications skills, and understanding role relationships within marriage.

This project is undertaken with a growth perspective that recognizes that the immense problems faced by reconstituted families can be met and overcome because stepfamilies are also huge pools of untapped energy and resources to meet those problems. It is out of this growth perspective that the hope comes that given time and proper encouragement stepfamily members can grow to love one another and reconstituted family living can be mutually fulfilling, joyous, and even fun.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENT SITUATION

This project began as an attempt to find a better model for doing premarital preparation with those persons who are about to enter a reconstituted family. The need for an improved model for (1) understanding reconstituted families and their problems and (2) preparing persons to enter reconstituted family living is acute. Most pastors have a vague awareness that there are an increasing number of reconstituted families in their churches, but a closer look at the statistics for just one year shows that this is a nation-wide phenomenon of startling proportions. For the purpose of illustrating this point, the statistics for just one state, California, for just one year, 1977, have been chosen.

In 1977, in California, there were 149,100 marriages and 131,360 divorces.¹ In Los Angeles County there were 44,869 marriages and 33,988 divorces.² In adjacent Orange

¹Vital Statistics of the United States, 1977, Vol. 3
--Marriage and Divorce (Hyattsville, MD: Office of Health
Research, Statistics, and Technology, National Center for
Health Statistics, 1981) 1-61.

²Ibid., 1-72.

County there were 12,401 marriages and 12,292 divorces (nearly a one-to-one ratio).³

Of the 149,000 marriages in California, 43,600 were remarriages for the brides and 47,040 were remarriages for the grooms.⁴ Of the brides, 37,860 had their previous marriage end in divorce and 5,720 were widows (80 declined to state). Of the grooms, 41,540 were divorcees and 5,420 had lost their spouse in death (80 declined to state).⁵

These statistics move us toward two conclusions. First, the divorce rate is on the rise. In America nearly half of the marriages end in divorce.⁶ And Second, a high percentage of the divorced will remarry. As Atkin says it, more than "seventy-five percent of all divorces end in marriage."⁷

Why Is the Divorce Rate So High?

Demographers now predict that fifty percent of all marriages will end in divorce.⁸ There have been many

³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., 1-61.

⁵Ibid.

⁶John L. C. Mitman, Premarital Counseling (New York: Seabury Press, 1980) xi.

⁷Edith Atkin and Estelle Rubin, Part-Time Father (New York: Vanguard Press, 1976) 121.

⁸Paul Bohannon and Rosemary Erickson, "Stepping In," Psychology Today 11:8 (January 1978) 53.

theories advanced attempting to explain why the divorce rate is so high. Probably none of them is complete enough in and of itself to account for the skyrocketing divorce rate, but it is equally likely that each contains a part of the data needed to understand why the divorce rate is so high.

Paul Landis offered a hypothesis over three decades ago that we had entered a time of "sequential monogamy."⁹ It seems quite likely that, as Oglesby, says it, the divorce rate is skewed by repeaters.¹⁰ And this, to some extent, is recognized by all.

It also seems quite likely that the number of divorces recorded has risen simply because better records of marriages and divorces are kept today. Scanzoni points out that in former times (particularly the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the United States), when there were enormous societal pressures against divorce and formal divorce proceedings were not available to persons on the frontier, divorces were not recorded even when one or the other of the parents abandoned the family.¹¹

⁹Paul H. Landis, "Sequential Marriage," Journal of Home Economics 42:8 (October 1950) 625.

¹⁰William B. Oglesby, "Divorce and Remarriage in Christian Perspective," Pastoral Psychology 25:4 (Summer 1977) 282-283.

¹¹John Scanzoni, "Family: Crisis or Change?" Christian Century 98:25 (August 12, 1981) 794.

Certainly one factor in the increased divorce rate is the increase in life expectancy.¹² As most pastors have seen in their own experience, as persons live longer there is no guarantee that they will remain together even though they have been married for many years.

Paul Glick, social scientist turned demographer, finds that there are, in his opinion, several factors contributing to the rise in the divorce rate. He lists:

- a. Demands made upon the upwardly mobile male at the expense of the family.
- b. Better jobs available to women.
- c. Social acceptance of divorce.
- d. The attitude that divorce may be a way to solve marriage difficulties.
- e. Relaxation of attitudes toward divorce by religious groups.
- f. Increase in equality of sexes.
- g. "No-fault" divorce laws.¹³

One factor which is now being explored in more depth is that of society's changing attitude toward the nature and function of marriage. As old sex based role models have crumbled, so has much of the outward force that held marriages (even destructive marriages) together in the past. Instead of meeting society's expectations, couples today find themselves more concerned with finding mutual fulfillment and satisfaction in marriage. Rather than the state of

¹²Hugh Carter and Paul C. Glick, Marriage and Divorce (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 242.

¹³Paul C. Glick, "A Demographer Looks at American Families," Journal of Marriage and the Family 37:1 (February 1975) 20-21.

marriage being one of the givens of society--the result of society's understanding that not only should one be married (unless presented with a sacrificial option such as a religious or vocational choice that would deny the possibility of marriage), but one should be married in a particular way--marriage is understood as a contract between two persons which can be dissolved (not easily or without pain) whenever that marriage becomes dissatisfying, unfulfilling, or destructive to one or both partners. Married partners have come to demand that marriage bring them happiness and will not remain married "for the sake of the children" or because of societal pressures.

Finally, we as a society, and more specifically, we as a religious community, must take responsibility for the fact that we have not done a good job preparing persons for marriage.¹⁴

Stepchildren

The rise in the divorce rate has brought a huge increase in the number of children who are living in a home with a stepparent. In our target year, 1977, over half of the divorces in America involved minor children; more than

¹⁴Claude A. Guldner, "Marriage Preparation and Marriage Enrichment: The Preventive Approach," Pastoral Psychology 25:4 (Summer 1977) 248.

1,123,000, in 1977 alone.¹⁵ Glick states flatly that four out of five divorced persons will remarry.¹⁶ Messinger and Walker believe that the majority will remarry within three to five years.¹⁷ One startling statistic is that an estimated forty percent of all children born in the United States in 1970 will live in a family touched by divorce.¹⁸ Given this data plus the knowledge that there will be added to this number children who have lost a parent through death (400,000 per year),¹⁹ and that seventy-five percent of all single parents do remarry within five years,²⁰ we can securely predict that there will be a tremendous number of children living in reconstituted families. The Vishers reported that in 1976 there were upwards of fifteen million children under the age of eighteen living in stepfamilies.²¹

One interesting sidelight comes from a study of cohabitation patterns (persons living together without

¹⁵Lillian Messinger and Kenneth N. Walker, "From Marriage Breakdown to Remarriage: Parental Tasks and Therapeutic Guidelines," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 51:3 (July 1981) 429.

¹⁶Glick, 24.

¹⁷Messinger and Walker, 429. ¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Brenda Maddox, The Half-Parent (New York: Evans, 1975) 8.

²⁰Fredrick Capaldi and Barbara McRae, Stepfamilies: A Cooperative Responsibility (New York: New Viewpoints/Vision Books, 1979) 4.

²¹Emily B. Visher and John S. Visher, Stepfamilies (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979) 4.

benefit of clergy) conducted by Glick and Spanier. They found a dramatic increase in the number of childless couples living together in the seventeen years of their study (1960-1977). However, during the same period the number of couples living together who had children virtually stayed the same.²² The implication may be that couples who have children from previous marriages choose to marry rather than simply live together. This may be, as some have confided to me, because they want to set what they feel will be a good example for their children.

Implications for Pastors

All of this data indicates that there will only be an increasing number of persons coming to clergypersons to be married and later to seek counseling.²³ Many of these couples will be coming to be married without having thought through the difficulties they will face as members of a reconstituted family. We, as clergypersons, must move to understand the issues that face persons in reconstituted family living and offer premarital preparation that will more adequately prepare these persons for stepfamily living.

²²Paul C. Glick and Graham B. Spanier, "Married and Unmarried Cohabitation in the United States," Journal of Marriage and the Family 42:1 (February 1980) 20-21

²³Charels William Stewart, "How Effective Are Our Marriage Ministries?" Pastoral Psychology 25:4 (Summer 1977) 262.

THE SCOPE AND INTENT OF THIS STUDY

This study was undertaken purely out of selfish motives, and I cannot help speaking of it in very personal terms. In this study I have attempted to do five things. First, I have tried to honestly examine my understandings of premarital preparation. As is the case with most pastors, the struggle to provide better pastoral care is one that causes me to rethink and rewrite my design for premarital preparation from time to time. I have no doubt that this will not be the final revision of my design for premarital preparation with reconstituted families. The benefit of this current study has been that it has caused me to consider once again all of my premarital preparation and even the justification for holding prewedding preparation sessions.

Second, through this study I have been forced to examine my theological assumptions of marriage and particularly my understandings of how divorce and remarriage fit into those theological assumptions.

Third, I have used this opportunity to expand my understandings of the issues (problems, challenges, and expectations) that face reconstituted families. This should be a requirement for all pastors, especially those of us who are not stepparents.

Fourth, and at the heart of the project, I have designed four premarital sessions which I have tested with the couples involved in this project. In addition, a follow-up session was used to allow the couples to evaluate the design.

And fifth, this design was used and evaluated with five couples. While the entire project has been a rich learning experience, the work with the couples, particularly the follow-up session, has been very rewarding.

While this study was undertaken primarily for my benefit and the benefit of the congregation I serve, I offer it here for two reasons. First, I hope it will encourage pastors to examine their own premarital preparation practices (particularly with reconstituted families). And second, to add my findings to the body of pastoral care literature with the hope that it will bring us one step closer to our common goal of providing better pastoral care to one segment of our world that often finds itself without help--the reconstituted family.

CHAPTER II

DEFINING PREMARITAL PREPARATION WITH
RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES

THE PARAMETERS OF PREMARITAL PREPARATION

The term, premarital preparation has been chosen for use in this study in preference to what in the past has been called premarital counseling. This has not been an arbitrary decision, but one that reflects some important differences between the process of counseling or psychotherapy and the design for premarital preparation. This difference has been recognized by those who work extensively in the field and is beginning to be reflected in the most current writings. Stahmann and Heibert, for example, define premarital counseling by saying:

Premarital counseling is not usually and primarily either counseling or psychotherapy. We do not see premarital counseling as a process dominated by the medical model, with its orientation toward pathology. Nor do we see premarital counseling as an examination of the emotional maturity of a couple. Rather, we see premarital counseling as a more generalized process focused on enhancing the couple's skills in their interpersonal relationship. . . . For us, then, premarital counseling could be viewed as pretherapy or education for marriage or prewedding counseling.¹

¹Robert F. Stahmann and William J. Hiebert, "Premarital Counseling: Process and Content," in their Klemer's Counseling in Marital and Sexual Problems (2d ed.; Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1977) 306.

By their own definition, Stahmann and Heibert have led use to some of the reasons it would seem to be more helpful to term our process premarital preparation rather than premarital counseling. One should be cautioned that this is much more than a semantic manipulation, for the process of premarital preparation described below is dependent upon a different focus. Our focus will be on growth rather than pathology and prevention rather than therapy. What will be presented is really an educative design rather than a counseling process.

Education and Counseling

While both counseling and education may have personal growth as their goal, counseling most generally focuses on some problem or illness. Unlike a counseling process in which couples come seeking aid, couples are invited to come and participate in an educational event (possibly even being required to attend). This means that the focus is not on spending a great deal of time defining a problem to be solved, which many find to be at the heart of the counseling process, at least in the early stages.²

But the separation between education and counseling is not as distinct as it may have been made to appear thus

²Jay Haley, Problem-Solving Therapy (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 9.

far. The truth is that premarital preparation is probably best described as an educative process in which space is given for problems to surface. Then, indeed, counseling may take place.

This, in fact, has been my experience. Often this results in the abandonment of the remainder of the premarital preparation design in favor of spending the remaining portion of our time (often extending the number of sessions) to deal with the matters that had opened to us. The premarital process can have the effect of creating some space in the lives of two busy people whose time is currently consumed with the matters relating to the arrangements for their wedding. Through this opening, issues--sometimes even long-standing problems--are given a chance to surface and counseling may take place. Once again, the division between "counseling" and "education" is somewhat artificial, for all of a pastor's counseling skills must be brought to bear in the process. Certainly, those who see their therapies as essentially educational in nature, such as Everett Shostrom, should be affirmed.³ And it is with equal certainty that I would affirm the growth producing qualities of both education and counseling.

³Everett L. Shostrom and Lila Knapp, Actualizing Therapy: Foundations for a Scientific Ethic (San Diego: Edits, 1976) 63.

Educative Counseling

Mostly likely a combination of terms such as Clinebell's term, "educative counseling," is most appropriate.⁴ Clinebell's understanding of educative counseling has strongly influenced this project.

As is true in the case of the educative counseling process described by Clinebell,⁵ diligent attempts should be made to form a warm, accepting relationship with the couples coming for premarital preparation. Almost all couples come with some trepidation. Many couples in which one partner has been previously divorced come anticipating that they will be judged harshly. Sometimes the fear is that their readiness for marriage will be judged and they will be found wanting.

Indeed, there is an aspect of premartial preparation in which the minister judges the couple's readiness for marriage.⁶ The question of whether or not a couple is ready for marriage is difficult to answer with certainty, but Antionette and Leon Smith insist that pastors must deal with this issue, despite the knotty ethical and practical problems

⁴Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966) 191.

⁵Ibid., 189-205.

⁶Antoinette Smith and Leon Smith, Growing Love in Christian Marriage (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1981) 42.

involved.⁷ They suggest that a pastor who is in doubt should ask, "can I marry them?" They further suggest that a negative answer must be balanced with caring for the couple. They suggest:

If the couple decide to marry, even when your best judgment says it may not work, we believe your being there for them and establishing a pastoral relationship will keep you available to them should they need you later.⁸

At any rate, the process of determining readiness for marriage, while important, is not the main focus of premarital preparation. When a couple comes for premarital preparation and expresses what seems to be undue anxiety over the potential unfavorable judgment of the minister, it may be wise to press for clarification. It may simply be a matter that they feel as if they have to be on their best behavior for the minister. On the other hand, their anxiety may be a clue to deeper problems.

Once the couple's anxiety over being judged as to their fitness for marriage is noted, it can usually be dispelled quite quickly with a simple statement from the pastor. However, the couple may display some anxiety because they are unclear about the premarital process. Spending some time discussing the goals and procedures, assuring the couple that they will not be asked to reveal

⁷Ibid., 42.

⁸Ibid.

any more about themselves than they are willing (which common sense tells us is true, but we often forget in the midst of our anxiety), should be done very early in the process. I have come to believe that even changing the name to premarital preparation (rather than counseling) lessens the anxiety level of some couples. Talking about this before hand in brochures or church notices as premarital education seems to be less threatening.

Following the discussion of the goals and the outline of the design, the pastor and the couple should spend some time "contracting" as to the number of sessions, the hours, and the dates. Even this early discussion of the mundane details can be an opportunity to make an assessment of the couple's openness or rigidity and their awareness of their needs and potential problem areas. Where there is a need or an indication of an interest, the pastor should be willing to put aside the agenda and stay with the concerns of the couple. During the first session it should be made clear that this time belongs to the couple as well as the pastor. Indeed, with some couples the bulk of the time spent together may well be in dealing with one specific problem area.

OTHER SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF EDUCATIVE COUNSELING

A Content Focus and a Relationship Focus

This educative approach to premarital preparation yields several relevant implications for our current study. In the process described below it should be noted that there is both a content focus and a relationship focus. While certain content related items will provide the foreground or primary focus, the couple's present relationship will remain as a secondary focus. As relationship issues emerge, they will be dealt with in a way that will allow the couple to shift the major portion of their attention from the specific informational data being presented to examine their relationship. This certainly seems to be in keeping with Mace's suggestion that the major focus of premarital counseling should be on here-and-now issues for the couple.⁹ Mitman reports that he often uses the finances relating to the marriage as a way of focusing on current attitudes in such a way that the couple's present relationship is brought into focus as they consider how they will use their money in the future.¹⁰

⁹David Mace, "The Real Answer to Today's Family Crisis," A Future for the Family; Proceedings of the 1973 Christian Life Commission Life Commission Seminar, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1973.

¹⁰John L. C. Mitman, Premarital Counseling: A Manual for Clergy and Counselors (New York:Seabury Press, 1980) 59.

While more will be said about this issue later in this paper, it seems worth mentioning that with previously married couples part of the relationship with which they will have to deal will be not only their relationship with their future spouse, but with their past spouse or their mate's ex-spouse. Here is a good example of a place where content and relationship run together, for while there may be abstract discussions of how one deals with an ex-spouse, the couple's present relationship is almost always brought into question.

A Program of On-Going Marriage Growth

Understanding premarital preparation as education for marriage is a very helpful concept because it plants the seeds of the idea that premarital preparation is just one part of an on-going program of marriage growth. In this premarital design this is accomplished in three ways. First, this is done through the use of some experiential learning exercises that are specifically adapted from marriage growth workshops. At the end of the sessions this is reflected to the couple. Often couples will ask where they can go to "get more." Second, a follow-up session is planned for sometime approximately three to six months after the wedding. And third, it seems wise to plant the seeds for regular marriage growth experiences at the time of premarital preparation by discussing some of the marriage growth

opportunities that are available. Mace suggests that we ought to have couples consider regular "check-ups" for their marriages.¹¹ Certainly one major reason for a pastor to use the pre-marital preparation time to build a strong relationship with the couple is because she or he may be the couple's only access to help in the future.¹² In a church that has on-going groups for marriage growth, a couple may be referred to any of these groups that may be appropriate or any other groups within the community in which they live.

Educational Tools

As mentioned above, some of the educative devices used in the sessions will be experiential learning techniques. In fact, experiential learning techniques will be employed whenever possible. It seems much more valuable to practice communication skills, for example, than only to hear about them.

What may well be termed reading assignments, or as some have called it, "bibliotherapy," will be used to a much greater extent than would be expected in the course of psychotherapy. Couples who are challenged simply to read extensively from the body of literature on stepparenting may

¹¹Mace, 55.

¹²To Love and To Cherish: The Pastor's Manual for Premarital Counseling in the United Methodist Church (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1970) 187.

be overwhelmed (or underwhelmed, given the unevenness of the quality of books on reconstituted families), so a short bibliography listing a few good books may be given to interested couples in addition to the "homework" assignments made.

Multiple hour sessions with clear contracts and clear designs for specific learning goals will be used. While there will be more said about this in the evaluation (Chapter VI), Mitman suggests that couples examine how well they fulfilled their part of the contract at the end of each session.¹³

As with psychotherapy, it is important to recognize that much work will be done between sessions. Much integration will take place between sessions and specific assignments to facilitate this may be given.

One of the component parts of premarital preparation must be the examination of the underlying theological concepts of Christian marriage. An examination of the wedding ceremony should take place and couples should be invited to write their own vows, should they wish. In addition, a discussion of the larger issue of the religious dimension of life and one's spiritual-existential needs and how those needs are met should be initiated.¹⁴ But in a large measure,

¹³Mitman, 59.

¹⁴Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., "Premarital Counseling: Religious Dimensions," in Stahmann and Hiebert, 319.

what happens, reflecting theologically, must come about through the pastor's concern and caring for the couple. Without this very tangible expression of grace, the couple will not really be able to understand an intellectual discussion of the grace made manifest in Christian marriage.

Stahmann and Barclay-Cope suggest two techniques common to premarital preparation that may be different from other types of counseling. First, many pastors use various inventories or questionnaires--often ones they develop themselves. And second, either audio or video tapes may be used to present data.¹⁵

Once again, the educative nature of the premarital preparation process is always held in tension with the kind of individual concern for persons that characterizes the counseling process and the educative design may be abandoned or modified to meet the needs of the persons involved.

RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES

For this study a reconstituted family will be defined as one in which one or more of the adults is a step-parent. In other words, one or both adults entering the marriage will bring one or more children, whether or not she or he is the custodial parent, to the marriage. At various points synonyms for reconstituted family will be used.

¹⁵Stahmann and Hiebert, 298.

These will include blended family or stepfamily. In many ways, as shall be shown below, it may seem more appropriate to speak of the reconstituting family, for the new family that comes together is a family in which the members are in the process of working out the nature of their being together.

Because of the diverse nature of stepfamilies and the many familial ties that touch the lives of the members of such families, the pastor may be challenged to work within broader circles than would normally be expected in premarital preparation. For example, with some potential stepfamilies it may be necessary to work with the children, ex-spouses, and even ex-in-laws as well as with the couple coming to be married. A knowledge of family systems approaches is extremely valuable when working with the broader families that may be involved in the lives of those who will be forming a newly reconstituted family.

COMMENTS ON THE DESIGN CHOSEN

There are probably other designs that are preferable to the one chosen. For example, it has long seemed, at least to me, that there is more openness on the part of most couples to the kind of information presented in premarital preparation shortly after the marriage than just before the marriage. In the main, this is due to the fact that most couples coming for premarital preparation--even those who

have been previously married--are more concerned with the details of the wedding than they are in shaping their future relationship.

The arguments for group premarital preparation are very persuasive and it seems likely that this is not only a more efficient way of doing premarital preparation, but superior results are achieved.¹⁶ Unfortunately, it is not possible for most ministers to gather a group of persons who are planning to be married about the same time.

Certainly one reason for this is that couples often do not plan far enough ahead or come in early enough for premarital preparation. But an even more important reason is that most local churches are small churches. In the United Methodist Church, one of the largest denominations, for example, one-third of all United Methodist congregations average fewer than forty-five persons at the principal weekly worship service. Two-thirds average fewer than one hundred.¹⁷ Forty-one percent of United Methodist congregations have fewer than one hundred members.¹⁸ Sixty-five

¹⁶Those unfamiliar with group premarital preparation may wish to read the excellent discussion in, Robert Charles Bjorklund, "Exploring Marriage: A Relational Workshop" (D.Min. project, School of Theology at Claremont, 1980)

¹⁷Lyle E. Schaller, "A Call for Restructure," Circuit Rider 4:2 (February 1980) 5.

¹⁸Ibid., 7.

percent have fewer than two hundred members.¹⁹ Eighty-two percent have three hundred ninety-nine or fewer members.²⁰ While it might be possible to hold group premarital sessions through cooperative ventures in urban areas, nine out of ten small churches are located in communities of fewer than 10,000.²¹

In addition, recent surveys indicate that two-thirds of the ministers polled have fewer than ten weddings per year, with the majority having six or fewer.²²

These statistics combine to give us a picture of what really is the case for most ministers. Most ministers do not have enough couples coming to be married at any one time even to schedule group premarital sessions in advance. Yet most ministers feel compelled to attempt some sort of premarital preparation. This is not done out of obligation to denominational or congregational demands, but out of a sense of caring for those who are entering marriage. This is especially true for those who are entering reconstituted families, for they will face many difficult problems.

¹⁹Rene O. Bideaux, "Planning in Small Membership Churches," Interpreter 25:5 (May 1981) 13.

²⁰Schaller, 7.

²¹Bideaux, 13.

²²Smith and Smith, 18.

Ministers know the statistics all too well. Fifty-two percent of all second marriages fail.²³ Forty-four percent of all reconstituted family marriages will end in divorce.²⁴ Even those who do stay together will face serious difficulties--possibly having one or more of the children leave home to live with another relative, friend or in a foster home or institution.

Persons come for premarital counseling not simply because it is required by the pastor or governing body of the church. Often couples come intentionally seeking the guidance of a pastor they know. It is well documented that couples seek out pastors for premarital preparation first among all other professionals.²⁵ And professionals working with families have long emphasized the value of premarital counseling.²⁶ Rutledge exclaims, "premarital counseling is the greatest educational and clinical opportunity in the life of a person. . . ."²⁷

²³Emalene Shepherd, "One Ministry to Divorced Persons," New World Outlook 42:1 (September 1981) 31.

²⁴Claire Berman, Making It as a Stepparent (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 10.

²⁵Helen Schonick, "Premarital Counseling: Three Years' Experience of a Unique Service," Family Coordinator 24:3 (Fall 1975) 322.

²⁶David Mace and Vera Mace, We Can Have Better Marriages If We Really Want Them (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) 123.

²⁷Aaron L. Rutledge, Pre-Marital Counseling (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1966) xiii.

DOES PREMARITAL PREPARATION HELP?

Despite all the enthusiasm for premarital preparation, the question remains, does it help? Many who have attempted to answer this question have only come away from their studies as doubtful as ever that the value of premarital preparation will ever be scientifically verified or disproven. One study done in Canada which posed the question, "Do Premarriage Programs Work?" was inconclusive. But two interesting conclusions came from their findings. First, couples who have received premarital counseling will be less likely to engage in destructive conflict with each other than those who have not received such counseling. And second, couples who have received premarital counseling will "seek assistance in solving either individual or marital problems more quickly than those who have not received such counseling."²⁸

Whether or not premarital preparation is effective, and there are those who feel it is or can be quite effective,²⁹ is a question to be raised again and again. In the meantime, as the issue is being debated, couples are coming

²⁸Gisele Microys, et al., "Do Pre-Marriage Programs Really Help?" (Results of a Research Project in Family Life Conducted by the Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, 1977) 24-25. (Mimeographed.)

²⁹David R. Mace, Getting Ready for Marriage (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972) 23-24.

to the church for premarital guidance. Here we have an opportunity to minister to persons in such a way as to, if nothing else, open the way for them to return for pastoral care after their marriage. But Mace sounds a clear note when he suggests a shift from understanding our ministry to be simply one of premarital preparation to this as one offering of the church which offers preventive, rather than remedial, assistance to couples.³⁰ Premarital preparation would then be seen in the larger context of the on-going program of the church for marriage growth.³¹

As persons live longer, the likelihood that their spouse will die and that they will remarry and become a stepparent increases. Despite the fact that newly acquired stepchildren are mature adults themselves, many problems can still arise. Senior citizens may have a very difficult time adjusting to a new spouse after a life-time of living with another person. When this is complicated by strained relationships with stepchildren, it can become a very stressful occasion. Unfortunately, far too little research has been done on the problems relating to senior citizens and reconstituted families.

For many pastors the tendency may be to waive the requirement for premarital preparation for those senior

55. ³⁰Mace, "The Real Answer to Today's Family Crisis."

³¹Ibid.

citizens who come to be married. The tendency is to feel that senior citizens know it all. Bit Mitman rightly cautions,

One should not assume that because one has been previously married (whether widowed or divorced) one's experience of marriage is sufficient to prepare one for marriage with yet another person.³²

While our premarital preparation may not be all that we would like, and it may not be now what it will be in the future, we are charged, as pastors, with serious responsibilities and given great opportunities to help persons standing at a particularly important juncture in their lives.

³²Mitman, 21.

Chapter III

REFLECTIONS ON A THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

PREMARITAL PREPARATION WITH DIVORCED PERSONS

Many of the couples who come for premarital preparation come with fear and trepidation. In part that may be because they are unsure of the process. But many come carrying high levels of anxiety because they have been divorced. Often their first question is, "do you marry divorced people?" In fact, some of these couples may have been refused by churches whose polity denies the rite of marriage in the church to those who have been previously divorced. In other cases it may have been the minister who, out of personal convictions, believed that she or he could not offer the marriage vows to one who had been divorced.

Even if church polity does not specifically prohibit marrying previously divorced persons in the church, the couple may come with unarticulated questions about marriage and divorce. Often these questions are related not only to matters of church polity, but to their own sense of unworthiness to be married in the church. These issues ought to drive clergypersons to rethink their personal, congregational, or denominational stance. This, in fact, may need to be one of our major concerns with some of the couples who come for premarital preparation. The following pages are a

summary (a very brief summary, at that) of my personal attempt to define the issues and wrestle with them. While, in some respects at least, this rethinking process must always continue and may be revised in the future, this chapter will reflect what I have found to be some of the major issues confronting me. I hope that the following pages will be understood in this fashion, but I also hope that this discussion will offer some beginning points and some resources for other clergypersons who are attempting to rethink their theology of marriage. Today, it is my contention, any theology of marriage must include a theology of divorce and remarriage.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the discussion of divorce we are driven back to the Bible to reexamine the biblical texts that have been used so often to prohibit divorce. The most helpful discussion has been in the course of the recent exegesis of the major texts relating to divorce and remarriage. The most helpful work in this area, for me, is the work produced by Atkinson,¹ speaking from the Anglican tradition, and the work of Myrna and Robert Kysar, in the United States.²

¹David Atkinson, To Have and To Hold (London: Collins, 1979) 144.

²Myrna Kysar and Robert Kysar, The Asundered (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978)

While there is a growing body of literature that supports their position, the Kysars speak most directly to the situation in America. And while we cannot reproduce all of their work here, their conclusions may be summarized.

Old Testament

In the Old Testament there are three types of literature in which references to divorce are found: prophetic passages (such as Malachai 2:13-16, in which divorce is decried); metaphorical passages in which God threatens to "divorce" unfaithful Israel (Hosea, chapters 1-3, is an especially good example); and legislative passages (most notably, Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

From their study of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, the Kysars conclude that the Old Testament has no general legislation regarding divorce and remarriage.³ Divorce was practiced, but there is no evidence that it was sanctioned in any official way and nowhere is the right to remarry guaranteed, although remarriage of divorced persons seems to have been practiced.⁴ If anything, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 seems to be a passage that would insure justice for women. It is clear that the man alone had the right to initiate a divorce, but

³Ibid., 30.

⁴Ibid., 31.

that he was now required to produce a piece of writing that the woman was legally divorced and free to remarry. This was somewhat of an improvement over the previous custom of simply dismissing a wife without evidence that she had been legally divorced. In addition, there must have been some evidence that the woman had practiced behavior unbecoming a wife.⁵ Once again, divorce and remarriage were practiced, but what we have is evidence of these customs rather than legislation instituting or prohibiting these practices. Given the wide variety of Old Testament material surrounding the other parts of life, the lack of comment on divorce and remarriage is curious. What we have is legislation regarding a custom of the people and a theological reflection on that custom which might say something such as: "God is concerned in situations of divorce and remarriage, as in all situations in which humans find themselves, to protect the dignity of the powerless."⁶

The subject of henosis, or the doctrine of "one flesh," is so important that it will be considered separately later in this chapter.

What we are driven to conclude is that the custom of divorce and remarriage was practiced in ancient Israel, but it was always in tension with the hebraic regard for

⁵Ibid., 30.

⁶Ibid., 31.

marriage which is seen in such places as Genesis 2:24 or Malachi 2:13-16. And this seems to be in continuity with the teachings of Jesus.

New Testament

The sayings of Jesus found in Matthew 5:28 and Matthew 19:10 and their parallels have traditionally been the Church's major grounds for the indissolubility of marriage.⁷ And there can be no denying that this pithy pronouncement preserved by the Church calls us back to the original intent of marriage. We need not deal with all the exegetical material surrounding these passages,⁸ but rather turn to the Kysar's conclusions.

With the simple statement,

What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.
(Mark 10:9)

Jesus not only holds before us the ideals of marriage, but the human condition that humans do separate. "The absolute will of God is sometimes frustrated by human error and human failure."⁹

⁷Walter Kasper, Theology of Christian Marriage (New York: Seabury Press, 1980) 47.

⁸For a brief exegetical statement surrounding the editorial issues, see Rudolf Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 132, 148.

⁹Kysar and Kysar, 51.

This captures a basic biblical theme: God's plan for creation has been distorted by human action.¹⁰ The institution of marriage is simply one example of where this happens. In a time when marriage had been cheapened by divorces that were executed with the slightest provocation and left the woman virtually without recourse or resources this was a necessary word. Yet this absolute demand is also balanced by a spirit that runs through the Gospels which is that of the radical acceptance of God. On the one hand is the absolute will of God or the creative intent of God and on the other is the absolute love of God or the redemptive intent of God.¹¹

Jesus taught that God has a clear and absolute intention for the character and quality of human life. But he is a God who offers unconditional love and acceptance all. . . .¹²

Jesus never meant for the radical assertions of God's creative intent to become a law for Christians. Jesus' ministry was in opposition to such legalism. Rather, Jesus's teachings suggest two things:

First, that we understand marriage as God intended it-- a permanent union between a man and a woman. But, second, that we understand that if human error thwarts God's intention for marriage, there is forgiveness and divine acceptance available.¹³

¹⁰Ibid. ¹¹Ibid., 54-55.

¹²Ibid., 55. ¹³Ibid., 57.

It is this balance between judgment and grace that makes the Kysars' discussion of divorce and remarriage in the writings attributed to Paul so meaningful and helpful. After a detailed exegesis of I Corinthians 7, and a more generalized discussion of Grace and Law within the framework of Paul's eschatology, they come to three conclusions.¹⁴

First, Paul does not see his statements about divorce and remarriage as a matter of salvation. Paul is insistent that we are not put right with God by following regulations and these are not to be understood as regulations.

Second, Paul believed that one could be pardoned by grace alone.

To become entangled in a destructive and hopeless relationship and to seek release from it by means of a divorce and the relationships of persons in marriage. But like all sin, the sin or marital failure and divorce is pardoned already by God's grace. This sin is no different from any other act or attitude that alienates one from God. It is simply another expression of the human inclination to distort God's creation and misdirect one's own life. But, equally, it is no different from any other human sin in that it has been forgiven by God's just and righteous nature.¹⁵

Third, the pardon and love of God, which comes to us through Christ, offers human beings a new beginning. If one were to suffer a marital failure and be denied the opportunity of another relationship it would seem to deny

¹⁴Ibid., 80. ¹⁵Ibid.

God's power to re-create the future through grace.¹⁶ Indeed, for many the passing out of one marriage and after a period of grief finding a new relationship is like experiencing death and rebirth.

It is clear that what we find in the biblical view of divorce and remarriage centers around a call to the ideal intention of marriage and a concession to the realism of the human condition. God's creative intention, which is expressed in Genesis 2, would lead to a life-long spiritual, as well as physical, union between a male and a female. Yet even in biblical times divorce did exist. Even Jesus' injunction in Matthew 19 acknowledges this. Yet the failure of humans to achieve the divine intention is not passed off lightly and is acknowledged as sin.

But here we must be careful to define sin as something more than just a violation of some human or divine regulation. Sin in this sense is more in the rupture or distortion of God's, creative intention. If, for example, we take Gutierrez's definition of salvation as being communion of persons with God and with one another,¹⁷ we catch a sense of this specialized definition of sin.¹⁸ Here the attempt

¹⁶Ibid., 81.

¹⁷Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973) 151.

¹⁸Kysar and Kysar, 89.

is not to seek to temper this judgment but to offer grace and forgiveness to those who have broken that bond of true communion.

Those who have experienced a divorce know the sense of deep alienation that such a rupture in a relationship can cause. They may feel angry, embarrassed to go to church or even out in public at all, guilty, financially disabled, or remorseful. Our pastoral wisdom should tell us that for those passing through such a trauma, it is a time of almost unbelievable stress. To deny this pain is not only to miss one of the great pastoral opportunities for the church, but to misunderstand the process of divorce.¹⁹ The Kysars suggest that it was this kind of concern for persons (most specifically, women) that caused Jesus to speak against divorce practices which were clearly oppressive and dehumanizing to women.²⁰

Robert Sinks argues that it is just this sort of concern for persons--the kind of over-arching concern that is seen in the Great Commandment--that will now allow laws or traditions to take precedence. Rather than being legalistic or inflexible, Jesus' approach Sinks argues, was

¹⁹William H. Willimon, "The Risk of Divorce," Christian Century 96:22 (June 20, 1979) 667.

²⁰Kysar and Kysar, 89.

adaptive.²¹ Following this line of argument, if Jesus had had to speak specifically rather than in generalities he might well have approved of divorce in conditions that would have otherwise proved to be oppressive and dehumanizing.

Likewise, Paul allows for divorce under circumstances that might otherwise become intolerably cruel, namely to live with a spouse who was antagonistic toward one's beliefs as a Christian (I Corinthians 7:15).

To say this may sound very threatening to the Church. The message that many protestants have heard loud and clear is that marriage is sacred and must be protected at all costs. "Whatever erodes the sanctity or jeopardizes the stability of marriage must be combated. Prime among these is divorce."²²

But this brings into question the nature of marriage. Is marriage binding because of the legal aspects of the state recognized marriage arrangement or does marriage stand or fall on the bonds that are formed in the relationship between the couple? Obviously, it is the latter. And given that assumption, then does the divorce decree cause the rupture in the relationship or simply recognize that an

²¹Robert F. Sinks, "A Theology of Divorce," Christian Century 94:15 (April 20, 1977) 377.

²²Ibid., 376.

irreparable breach has been created? Once again, it is obviously the latter.

Does all of this mean that the Church "condones" or approves of divorce? And if the Church does not actively promote a position which is clearly in opposition to divorce, will not persons divorce and remarry rather casually and take marriage less seriously?

The biblical position is clearly one that holds up God's creative intent in marriage. But there is an undercurrent of grace that says that God stands ready to offer persons who have been divorced the gracious opportunity of another chance to form a relationship.

Here Thomas Oden is helpful in his discussion of grace. He asks, "Does not unmerited grace invite gross irresponsibility? Does it not tempt us merely to follow our self-assertive interests . . . ?"²³ While Christianity may seem to be (at least potentially) the least moral of all religions because it seems to offer easy forgiveness, this is not the case. For God not only offers a community in which we can grow, "a koinonia in which love can be nurtured and experienced. But God also offers a koinonia where we can confront one another in love."²⁴ Oden goes on to say,

²³Thomas C. Oden, Agenda for Theology (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) 127.

²⁴Ibid., 128.

The bare word of unconditional pardon would be scandalously immoral without a community concerned with the ever-deepening maturity in Christ and deeper participation in God's mission of love for the world. Christianity hopes that both persons and social processes will in some measure be redeemed from sin in fact and not merely in principle.²⁵

If we in the Church can see "sin" in the sense of the brokenness of relationships that we have spoken of above, we can see that whether or not we have been divorced we have all sinned and fallen short. It is out of our sense of having been forgiven, our sense of having been loved, our sense of having been dealt with mercifully, that we can become the bearers of the good news. It is in grace that we can become priests to our sisters and brothers to confront them when they need to be confronted. It is the grace of God that allows us to bear our pain, not run away from it.

In the past we have worried that many might become very casual about marriage if they were once divorced or if divorce were easily accomplished. To be sure, there are those who have practiced a kind of serial monogamy,²⁶ but the vast majority of persons whom I have seen have brought a much harsher judgment on themselves than anyone else ever could. It is this deep sense of grief and self-alienation that the Church can address best through groups for the

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Paul H. Landis, "Sequential Marriage," Journal of Home Economics 42:8 (October 1950) 625-628.

recently divorced and individual counseling when it is appropriate. These persons who need to hear a word of grace must not be shut out of the structure of our churches. To those coming for premarital preparation the Church can pronounce a word of hope and grace to persons who may have become separated from the koinonia because of their own fears or the rejection (imagined or real, intentional or unintentional) which they may have felt.

But those coming for premarital preparation sense more than just the judgmental attitudes of church members. They know that in the past the Church has held some positions that make the Church's theology of marriage irreconcilable with divorce. And so they come, often without being entirely clear about the desire that nags within them to reconcile their theology with the reality of their situation as divorced persons. In the following section we will examine two of the most prevalent and troublesome doctrines not only in the light of new biblical insights disclosed by recent exegetical work and theology, but in light of our new insights into the nature of human beings and their institutions as well.

TWO PROBLEMATIC DOCTRINES

The Order of Creation

Certainly one of the most troublesome traditional

doctrines of marriage is that one that argues from Genesis 2 that marriage is a part of the order of creation. One of the most responsible exponents of this line of thinking is Helmut Thielicke.²⁷

If this were simply a line of argument that stated that marriage was instituted by God as God's intent for all humankind, it might be easily disputed by referring to Jesus (whose absence of comment advising persons to marry is striking) or Paul (who openly advised Christians not to marry). Throughout much of church history celibacy has been exalted. But in Thielicke's statements about the order of creation there is exposed the much deeper issue of an androcentric view of marriage that is no longer tenable. And here we have rightly underscored order. Thielicke's argument hinges not on whether God instituted marriage as a part of the unchanging and unchangeable demand that persons ought to be married and that the married state is the preferable one for humans, but on the "natural" relationship of the superiority of men over women (and the male taking the position as head of the family). He argues that marriage is established because of the order of creation which "naturally" sees the father as the head of the household with the mother under

²⁷ Helmut Thielicke, Theological Ethics, Vol. 3, Sex (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979)

his direction and the children under his direction.²⁸

Marriage is seen as an institution which is given to two individuals and they are called to it; in this relationship each has an "organic" function.²⁹ If there is equality (and one seriously doubts there is), it is within the bounds of the roles which are defined by "organic" differences. That is, by sexually assigned roles. Within this androcentric view of marriage concerns for the husband, children, or even the family as a unit must be put ahead of the wishes of the wife, which the following passage illustrates.

However, on the basis of our position that marriage is an ordinance which is given to the individual, this freedom of decision granted to the wife . . . cannot mean that the wife can make her decision in the name of her own individuality and its untrammelled development. On the contrary, she is bound to bring her work and the choice of her domicile into harmony with the primary obligation which is laid upon her by responsibility as a wife and mother.³⁰

In discussing what he calls a "borderline" situation, in which there is a disagreement between the husband and wife, the father must exercise his right to make the final decision as the final authority in the matter.³¹ All else he dismisses as a "mechanically interpreted principle of

²⁸Ibid., 149.

²⁹Ibid., 152.

³⁰Ibid., 154.

³¹Ibid., 159.

equal rights."³² The fact that Thielicke missed the basic inequality in the simile of the creation of woman from man³³ and the use of the analogy of the Church as the bride of Christ,³⁴ only serves to make one more dubious about his conclusion that marriage has some sort of ontic quality based in the very nature of things or in the order of creation as he has described it.

In short, the correctness of the patriarchal order which Thielicke attempts to defend must be doubted. Thielicke's statements in this area have been chosen because they are some of the most responsible. But there are others who are not as responsible and the old hierarchy of husband-wife-children still has a great deal of power. For that reason I will take this opportunity to comment further on this concern before returning to some final statements on the order of creation.

As we have seen above, a large measure of the justification for the patriarchal hierarchy is based on the supposed "natural" differences between men and women. To take this line is to adopt a shaky position at best. Modern science has demonstrated that there are fewer justifications for sex roles based on the biological differences between

³²Ibid., 157.

³³Ibid., 105.

³⁴Ibid., 108.

men and women than once thought. The old phrase "anatomy is destiny" is a tribute to society's attempt to impose defined roles rather than a biological imperative which defines human capabilities according to one's gender. While there are biological differences and psychological differences that are biologically based to some extent, most psychological differences are learned and the psychological differences between men and women are not nearly as large as was previously assumed.³⁵ Even some of the once assumed biological differences are beginning to disappear. It is unfortunate that, as Letty Russell says it, "A lot of theology in the past has discussed human sexuality under the guise of what is biologically 'natural'."³⁶

Russell goes on to say that men and women who "challenge the hypocrisy and destructiveness of many of our marriage customs"³⁷ are not doubting that marriage is a part of God's intention for human beings, but are saying that what is demanded is equal partnership.³⁸ Seen from the perspective of koinonia marriage is viewed as an expression

³⁵John H. Gagnon, Human Sexualities (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman, 1977) 67-68.

³⁶Letty M. Russell, The Future of Partnership (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979) 85.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 94.

³⁸*Ibid.*

of the possibility for interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. Here partners in marriage are not seen as two halves of a marriage relationship, but two "whole persons capable of human interrelatedness."³⁹

Here Nelson's understanding of "symbolic interactionism" as it is applied to sexuality and marriage is helpful.⁴⁰ More will be said of this concept in the following section, but suffice it to say that this concept argues that we live in a world which we interpret through symbols. But these symbols are always modified by our social setting. As our social setting changes so will our perceptions and the meanings we give those perceptions.

Today we live in a time when marriage has meaning not because of its "givenness" or a sense that it has been decreed from God. Those entering marriage today seek not to maintain an order which they understand as being a product of divine will. Rather, they enter a relationship which, hopefully, will bring personal enrichment and fulfillment in the context of trust, mutuality, and responsibility.

Quite frankly, we live in a time of transition between an older, patriarchal understanding of marriage that

³⁹Ibid., 95.

⁴⁰James B. Nelson, Embodiment (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978) 27.

was held together largely by a combination of social pressures and a willingness on the part of the participants to maintain what they understood to be the divinely ordered plan for creation and a time when marriages are largely held together because they represent opportunities for personal fulfillment and joy. Roth and Ruether point out that ultimately this will have far-reaching implications.⁴¹ Far beyond just dividing household chores or defining who will have the opportunity for advancement, an understanding of marriage as a covenant made among equals may revolutionize our image of the divine-human covenant as well.⁴²

The "One Flesh" Doctrine

A second major problem area is around what has come to be called, "one flesh." This doctrine appeals to the statement in Genesis 2:24:

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh.

A primary spokesperson for this position is Derrick Sherwin Bailey. For Bailey, becoming one-flesh (or henosis) "denotes the essential informing principle in marriage, the

⁴¹Wolfgang Roth and Rosemary Radford Ruether, The Liberating Bond (New York: Friendship Press, 1978) 57.

⁴²Ibid., 59.

interior, ontological aspect of sexual union."⁴³ The Old Testament witnesses to the power of the bonding that sexual intercourse has upon people,⁴⁴ as does our contemporary experience. But there are serious problems that come about from this "one flesh" doctrine.

Certainly one problem is the mystical description that Bailey and others must necessarily use in describing henosis. But this is far over-shadowed by the problem of the loss of identity that would seem to take place. Bailey says, for example, that the couple who has undergone this transformation have become "an organic biunity."⁴⁵

While Bailey struggles hard to overcome what feels more like an absorption of one person's personality into the other's, his arguments remain unconvincing. For example, he says:

The perfection made known in the vision is not only a potential moral perfection; it foreshadows also the integration of lover and beloved in their perfect union as 'one flesh' which is the end of their love. One purpose of henosis is the establishment of a balanced and fruitful androgyny in place of the disruptive androgyny of the solitary and unintegrated man or woman. In the completing of each lover by the

⁴³Derrick Sherwin Bailey, The Mystery of Love and Marriage (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952) 46.

⁴⁴Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) I, 150.

⁴⁵Bailey, 68.

other tension of strife between the androgynous elements in the personality of each is resolved and converted into a tension of repose. Both become integrated in themselves and also integrated together in the 'one flesh' where the full meaning of love is realized.⁴⁶

Or again,

In nothing do they live for themselves alone, but out of their separate lives a common life of distinctive character is built up by sharing of everything they possess.⁴⁷

One of the most serious difficulties with Bailey's system is that while it is based in love, Bailey finds no place for a concession that persons cease to love each other and that when that happens this situation ought to be grounds for admitting that the relationship has become irreparably broken and divorce ought to take place.⁴⁸ While Bailey's intent is undoubtably to argue for the significance of the bonding that comes from the act of sexual intercourse, it is his sense of the irrevocable nature of intercourse that we need to question. Here once again we are helped by Nelson's application of the principles of "symbolic interactionism." Indeed, sexual intercourse is deeply tied to the meaning we give it. It can be an expression of tenderness and caring or, even within the bounds of

⁴⁶Ibid., 17-18.

⁴⁷Ibid., 67.

⁴⁸Ibid., 81.

marriage, it can be cruel and brutal. Not only does that meaning change from time to time, but it is subject to the context in which it takes place.

The irrevocable nature of henosis for Bailey seems to ignore what most couples have found on their own, namely that "marriage is not a state which is suddenly or miraculously experienced in the lives of two people,"⁴⁹ but a process of growth. Here we are aided by Norman Pittenger's application of process theology. Persons are in process; they are not static, but in the process of becoming. As Nelson has characterized Pittenger's thought, we are "human becomings more than human beings."⁵⁰ Or, as Pittenger says it, "we are indeed personalities in the making."⁵¹

Human loving is seen within the plan of God for human beings so that they should move toward more fulfillment in loving each other, thereby disclosing more fully the true nature of the love God has for humankind.⁵² The elements that bind people together in their quest, the process, are the ingredients of love:

⁴⁹Kysar and Kysar, 97.

⁵⁰Nelson, 138.

⁵¹W. Norman Pittenger, Making Sexuality Human (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970) 46.

⁵²Ibid., 47.

Commitment or dedication, the desire to give to another from that which he or she would give; expectation of fresh and refreshing novelty in the relationship of one human being with another; union or communion or fellowship or sharing.⁵³

In his chapter entitled, "An Ethic of Sexuality," Pittenger allows that there may be times when affection, commitment and responsibility may not be present, in which case a sexual liaison may be wrong, for there are parameters dividing what is permitted and what is not. In part, we can know if these elements are missing if there is coercion, cruelty, or a denial of love. But underneath this all is the guidance of God.⁵⁵ He says,

The 'guidance' of God is not dictation nor verbal direction; it is found when a man keeps his eyes open, uses his head, and thus sees opportunities for good before him."⁵⁶

Here, it would seem, we have an opening that suggests that as persons are in the process of becoming they may be led by God to terminate not just a relationship that is cruel or inhumane, but one in which love has died. Humankind is "personality in the making."⁵⁷ God as love

⁵³Ibid., 43.

⁵⁴Ibid., 79-80.

⁵⁵Ibid., 87-88.

⁵⁶Ibid., 84-85.

⁵⁷Ibid., 94.

imprints the divine image on humankind. Wholehearted acceptance of that love is the acceptance of salvation. But what are we saved from? "From lovelessness, meanness, cheapness, superficiality, hypocrisy, wrongful self-assertion."⁵⁸

This would seem to be very close in intent with what Robert Sinks had in mind when he said,

There are occasions, however--the frequency of which will still be the subject of lively debate--when divorce is a responsible act. When continuation in an unfilling or destructive marriage thwarts and crushes human lives, then provision must be made for ending that marriage. Sometimes divorce may be little other than an escape from the intolerable. On other occasions it may be a clear and creative movement toward fulfillment through which persons recognize that their present relationship no longer gives hope to the growing potentialities of either partner.⁵⁹

Bailey rightly sees the power of the love which brings persons together (henosis). But that love is not static. Tillich saw things correctly, I believe, when he spoke of love as the power which overcomes estrangement.⁶⁰ We are continually in a process of coming closer to one another and drawing back and occasionally the bond between us is broken and love ceases to be between us. The question is, can theology give us both resources to deal with our lives once this happens and instruct us so that such an irreparable breach might be avoided?

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Sinks, 379.

⁶⁰Paul Tillich, Love, Power, and Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) 25.

Donna Schaper has suggested that theology has relinquished its influence on marriage.⁶¹ We might extend this line to say that marriage has become much more of a secular institution than a religious or ecclesiastical institution. Today in our highly secularized world the connection that was once almost automatically made in the minds of even the most common folk between God's love and human loving in marriage is no longer so often made. In the past, marriage was used as an analogy for divine-human relationships. Persons were instructed about the love of God or the relationship of Christ to the church by examining the well-defined institution of marriage. Today, in a time when the institution of marriage is much less well-defined, the analogy can no longer be made with such certainty that the hearer will know immediately what is meant. If anything, persons look to the church to theologize about God's love as a way of understanding how it is that we ought to love one another in marriage.

TOWARD A CREATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE INFORMED BY THEOLOGY

In this section I would like to suggest some contemporary theologizing that I have found helpful.

⁶¹Donna Schaper, "Marriage: The Impossible Commitment?" Christian Century 96:22 (June 20, 1979) 671.

In the past many have suggested that we might use the analogy of human reconciliation to understand God's action. I would suggest that we might use our understanding of some of the major theological doctrines as a way of informing ourselves of the way humans need to live. Daniel Day Williams has suggested that there are four elements in the traditional doctrine of the atonement: (1) disclosure, (2) loyalty and suffering, (3) an I-Thou relationship, and (4) new community.⁶² I would suggest that this might offer a very helpful and instructive outline.

By disclosure Williams means that kind of risk taking that comes about when one is really honest about his or her real motives and self-deceptions--in short, confession.⁶³ But there is a real sense that this cannot happen between two persons unless there is love reaching out to bridge the gap of estrangement and fear which we all carry with us. Those couples who cannot participate in disclosure are most often the ones who have the greatest difficulty. This is at the heart of intimacy.

The second element, loyalty and suffering, is more difficult to grasp since it is basically analogous to the suffering of Christ. It is the awareness of "the continuing

⁶²Daniel Day Williams, The Spirit and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 177-191.

⁶³Ibid., 177.

action of God restoring the world to its right mind and spirit."⁶⁴ We may even shy away from this element because in the past the emphasis has been put on the necessity for the wife to be loyal and long-suffering. Letty Russell has found, in her discussion of partnership, that the heart of partnership is what she terms transuence, or the "ability to go beyond ourselves toward others in order to realize our own being."⁶⁵ Our understanding of loyalty and the willingness to set aside personal goals or desires in favor of our partner's needs and wishes is based not in a rigid patriarchal understanding of marriage but in mutuality and deep concern.

Williams uses Buber's understanding of I-Thou as his third element. Coming from a time when the patriarchal structure of sex related role divisions, many are aware of the ways in which marriage relations have been I-It relations. Or, with apologies to Martin Buber, rather than I-THOU, it was I-thou.

The concept of the formation of a new community within the bonds of marriage is an appealing figure. Despite the difficulties mentioned above, there is something appealing about Bailey's concept of henosis. Anyone who

⁶⁴Ibid., 181.

⁶⁵Russell, 199.

has experienced the satisfaction of a good marriage is bound to feel as if there is something new that has been created as two persons have truly touched each other's lives. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. But more than that, there is something growing and becoming a new community as well as what has already emerged.

Letty Russell speaks of the three-fold tension of the "already not yet."⁶⁶ She says that we are already partners as we come to marriage, realizing that God "has reached out to us and reconciled us, making us partners of one another and God."⁶⁷ But we are also in the process of becoming partners. Commitments may be broken and we can never be sure that we will be faithful. Yet at the same time we live in the hope that we will become partners.⁶⁸

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREMARITAL PREPARATION

From this discussion I believe that it is possible to draw some conclusions that offer helpful implications for premarital preparation.

First, marriage is understood not so much as a "given" quality of relationship in which roles are clearly

⁶⁶Ibid., 54.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 54-55.

understood and persons strive to match themselves with those role expectations because these indeed reflect God's expectation. Rather it is that each relationship must be defined within the context of each new situation. Society no longer has the exclusive right to define roles. This must be done in a contracting fashion with each of the partners in the marriage stating as clearly as possible her or his wants and needs. Part of the job of premarital preparation must be to help persons do this on a simple level before they are married as a way of teaching the principles of contracting so that they may be employed after the couple is married.

Second, and coming from the first, is the new sense of equal partnership in marriage. Despite the patriarchal understanding of marriage in the Bible, the biblical image is clearly one of a God who calls people out of oppression into freedom. Along side the images of Genesis 2 stands the call to freedom and equality of the Christ as expressed in Galatians 3.

And third, premarital preparation must be a process in which those who have been wounded by life experience some healing and experience grace from those who are themselves wounded healers. For those who have been divorced or widowed we must inquire into their well-being. Have they recovered from their grief? Have they received counseling during this time? How do we perceive them? Are we ready to accept them? Many of those who come to premarital

preparation come to check into the church once again to see if they might be accepted.

Chapter IV

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR PREMARITAL PREPARATION
WITH RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES

THE NEED FOR PREMARITAL PREPARATION

A Better Understanding by Pastors

The litany of statistics showing the ever escalating divorce and remarriage rate is all too familiar to local church pastors and other professionals who do premarital preparation. Despite the fact that even among the clergy there is a growing number of reconstituted families, for the most part we, as clergypersons, have failed to become well acquainted with the problems (much less the joys) of living in a reconstituted family.¹ And the result of this is that we have not been able to be very helpful to some of the members of our congregations who have been hurting the most.

In part, this is because much of the counseling of stepparents is done by pastors who are unable to step outside of the model of nuclear family interaction that insists that reconstituted families ought to look just like

¹Frederick Capaldi and Barbara McRae, Stepfamilies: A Cooperative Responsibility (New York: Viewpoints/Vision Books, 1979) 2-3.

non-reconstituted nuclear families.² This has not only caused heartache to countless blended families, but offers an ineffective model for premarital preparation.

The purpose of this chapter is to present some of the issues that are uniquely common to reconstituted families and the issues that may be worth raising with those who are considering marriage that will bring them to a reconstituted family. It is my belief that only as reconstituted families accept the fact that they cannot duplicate or be a substitute for the original family and face squarely some of the unique problems of reconstituted families--which can be met and conquered--that they can go on to develop relationships that are nurturing, supportive, and fun.³

Unfortunately, we are given little help on how to proceed. There is no preparatory manual written for successful stepparenting.⁴ The suggestions that follow come from a survey of the literature on stepparenting and the practical experience of observing and counseling reconstituted families in a local church setting. By no means

²Emily B. Visher and John S. Visher, "Common Problems of Stepparents and Their Spouses," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 48:2 (April 1978) 254.

³Ourselves and Our Children (New York: Random House, 1978) 170.

⁴Joel D. Block, To Marry Again (New York: Gossett & Dunlap, 1979) 2.

do these represent the entire spectrum of issues that face newly reconstituted families; these are but a sampling of the problems most often confronted by reconstituted families.

Premarital Preparation Should Begin As Early As Possible

To be effective in helping reconstituted families begin to deal with the problems that almost inevitably will face them, we must not only begin to sensitize couples to the issues they will face, but as early as possible we must alert them to the fact that they will have much to overcome. The Nobles advise, "If there is one commandment in stepfamily relationships it is that you talk about your expectations as early as possible."⁵

A Conceptual Model

Part of the difficulty for those clergy who are not members of a reconstituted family is in understanding that the process through which a reconstituted family moves as it seeks to become a family, is as I have already suggested, quite different from that in which a couple marries, has children, and over a period of time becomes a family. The key word here may be process. The way in which we understand that process will be one of the controlling factors

⁵June Noble and William Noble, How to Live with Other People's Children (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1977) 3.

in determining what issues are raised for couples coming for premarital preparation.

Jane Ransom and her associates have given us some help in conceptualizing this process by seeing it in three phases with various tasks to be accomplished in each stage.⁶

In the first phase there may still be mourning over the loss of the predivorce family. Feelings of guilt and failure may be present (although buried). There may be fears that the children might now feel jealous, anxious, or even abandoned by a parent who takes his or her primary energies away from the children and the previous family to reinvest those energies in a new relationship.⁷ A frank, open discussion of the potential for these feelings not only in parents in the form of their deepest fears, but in children in actuality, may allow them to begin to be worked through in premarital preparation.

The second phase often involves a time when the partners who have struggled through a time of divorce come to grips with their feeling of lack of self-confidence in their ability to sustain romantic relationships. This may be compounded by the fact that both the child and the parent

⁶Jane W. Ransom, Stephen Schlesinger, and Andre P. Derdeyn, "A Stepfamily in Formation," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 49:1 (January 1979) 37-39.

⁷Ibid., 37-38.

have over-invested themselves in a post-divorce relationship. Now the parent must move to develop a "primary bond" with a new spouse. As this happens, children who have yearned for the reuniting of their parents come to grips with two feelings: the desire to form a bond with the stepparent and a yearning to be loyal to his or her natural parent.⁸ This ambivalence may result in a child physically moving to live with one or the other parent only to decide to move back to the original custodial parent.

The third stage, the restructuring of the family roles, is accomplished as the spouse and children accept the stepparent's right to function as a parent. In turn, the stepparent has accepted her or his parental roles with the appropriate boundaries.⁹

I have briefly sketched this schema because it is the most complete and accurate I have found and because it seems important to hold an understanding that the family that will be joined together through the coming wedding will be in the process of reconstituting. Once again, to understand this as a process, and a process which may take as long as two or three years, is extremely helpful.¹⁰ To hold

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 38-39.

¹⁰Block, 94.

the image of the family in process of being reconstituted is very important, for without that conceptualization, the discussion which follows will seem disjointed and lacking in any systematic understanding of how it is that families can understand the events which at the same time bind them together and attempt to tear them apart.

Clarification of Motivation

Certainly one of the tasks of premarital preparation must be to assist couples as they clarify their motivation for getting married. As with persons who are marrying for the first time, there are pressures from friends, family, and even society in general to get married. But for a person who has been divorced or widowed, the pressures to remarry are enormous. Block says,

In our coupled world, estrangement from married friends, alienation from many social activities, and an isolated position in the community kindles the temptation to remarry. Add the desire for stability that marriage is supposed to bring, the yearning for someone to share one's social life, the difficulty of living alone and being a lone parent--and the motivation to remarry increases.¹¹

¹¹Ibid., 11.

Owen and Nancie Spann warn that motivations of financial security or assistance in raising the children will not replace love.¹²

Life-Style Differences

Life-style differences should be discussed thoroughly before marriage. The Spanns warn that the issues that will most tend to undermine a family are not the ones involving major decisions, but the "nitty-gritty" differences in life-style.¹³ Part of the reason life-style differences may not have been discussed in detail prior to the couple's coming for premarital preparation may be because one or both partners harbor great fears that an honest discussion of life-style differences might be damaging to their partner's image of him or her.¹⁴ Resistance to attempts to discuss life-style differences may be a clue for the pastor that this is an area to explore in depth.

Capaldi and McRae suggest that life-style differences may be the result of one's experiences and thoughts

¹²Owen Spann and Nancie Spann, Your Child? I Thought It Was My Child! (Pasadena, CA: Ward Richie Press, 1977) 29-30.

¹³Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁴Sharyn R. Duffin, Yours, Mine and Ours (Rockville, MD: National Institute of Mental Health, 1978) 7.

about family systems. In fact, it is often the case that both potential spouses have very different ideas about family life, but assume that their values and beliefs are shared by their partner.¹⁵ They suggest that four questions should be discussed as a part of premarital preparation.

1. What was your childhood perception of family?
2. What type of family system or style did you and your ex-spouse create? Describe your ex-spouse's childhood perception of family and discuss the resultant merger of family styles.
3. As a single parent, did your ideas of what a family should be change?
4. How will your idea of 'family' blend with your new spouse's perception of family? Are they similar. Very different? If different, what are the areas of compromises?¹⁶

From looking at these questions two conclusions should be clear. First, adjusting to a new partner's habits and coordinating daily routines may be made more difficult by the fact that by the time one comes to a second marriage many of one's habits are already set.¹⁷ And very closely related to this is the realization that a single-parent family has had to struggle hard to organize itself. It may be very hard and very disruptive for a new family member to enter the family. When that happens, that family must

¹⁵Capaldi and McRae, 14-16.

¹⁶Ibid., 16.

¹⁷Duffin, 7.

struggle to reorganize itself again. Unfortunately, reconstituted families are given very few guidelines for roles, relationships, and functions.¹⁸

In summary, to initiate discussions about family life-style differences as a part of premarital preparation will not only help the couple anticipate some of the problems they will face, but also help them be intentional in the creation of the life-style they would like for their family.

Consideration for the Feelings of the Children

Another task of the premarital sessions is to initiate consideration of the feelings of the children. In the excitement of the plans for the wedding, too little attention may be paid to the children. Partly because of this, and partly because of the presence of a new step-parent, the children may feel as if they now count less.²⁰

It is important to take into account a child's feelings. A child should not be consulted as to whether or

¹⁸Lillian Messinger and Kenneth N. Walker, "From Marriage Breakdown to Remarriage," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 51:3 (July 1981) 436.

¹⁹Suzy Kalter, Instant Parent (New York: A. & W., 1979) 21.

²⁰Ruth Roosevelt and Jeanette Lofas, Living in Step (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) 11.

not her or his parent should remarry, but it is important to allow children to express their anxieties and concerns about a proposed wedding.²¹ Children need time to prepare themselves for this sort of drastic change. Parents should listen sensitively to their thoughts and feelings. And, once again, parents should realize that it will take time for children to work through their feelings about what this marriage will mean and the changes it will bring.²²

Atkin and Rubin suggest that if both spouses have children who are not already acquainted--such as in the case of a custodial parent and a non-custodial parent whose children live quite a distance away--they introduce the two sets of children sensitively. Rather than elaborate plans, such as an outing to an amusement park, these early experiences ought to be simple experiences that will create the fabric of a family: going on a picnic, preparing a meal together, painting a fence, washing the car, or cleaning out the garage.²³ This may also save the non-custodial father from becoming a "Disneyland daddy" who, motivated by his guilt, showers his children with expensive gifts and outings and never really does what is important,

²¹Capaldi and McRae, 80.

²²Block, 95.

²³Edith Adkin and Estelle Rubin, Part-Time Father (New York: Vanguard Press, 1976) 140.

namely, spending his precious time to influence and shape his children's lives.

TWO MAJOR DIFFICULTIES FOR RECONSTITUTED FAMILIES

Discipline

Among both the authorities on the issues facing reconstituted families and stepparents themselves, there is a general consensus that discipline is a major area of conflict for most reconstituted families. Emily and John Visher find it to be the number one problem that stepfamilies face.²⁴ In her work with seventy remarried couples, Messinger found that while partners in first marriages ranked discipline problems with children quite low on a list of items in which conflict occurred, discipline problems with children ranked first with stepfamilies.²⁵ The Nobles echo this saying, "The most crucial expectation to be worked out is the one dealing with discipline, and it should be discussed early."²⁶

²⁴Emily B. Visher and John S. Visher, Stepfamilies (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979) 138.

²⁵Lillian Messinger, "Remarriage Between Divorced People with Children from Previous Marriages: A Proposal for Preparation for Remarriage," Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling 2:2 (April 1976) 196.

²⁶Noble and Nobel, 3.

It certainly seems important for stepparents to acquaint themselves with the methods of discipline used before the marriage by the natural parent.²⁷

Capaldi and McRae have found that many stepparents bring one of two attitudes to family living. Either they (1) know all about parenting and plan to be a "superparent" or they (2) plead ignorance and plan to stay in the background as a "reluctant stepparent."²⁸

The first type, the ones determined to be "superparents," often try too hard. Particularly if they have never raised a child before, these parents tend to be rigid and stern disciplinarians, pledging to themselves that their stepchildren will be perfect.²⁹

Stepfathers are particularly prone to becoming reluctant stepparents. As Turow puts it, they feel like a "third wheel" with their wife's children and refuse to involve themselves in family skirmishes.³⁰ For some stepparents it is because they actually resent being responsible for their mate's children. But for many others (in fact, we may say most) it is because they are unsure of their role.

²⁷Capaldi and McRae, 69-70.

²⁸Ibid., 53. ²⁹Noble and Noble, 60-61.

³⁰Rita Turow, Daddy Doesn't Live Here Anymore (Matteson, IL: Great Lakes Living Press, 1977) 172.

Double Messages. The role confusion that a stepparent may experience may be because she or he is getting a double message from the natural parent. On the one hand, a natural parent may want the stepparent to take on more parenting functions and at the same time experience a high level of ambivalence because she or he wishes to maintain exclusive control.³¹ As one stepparent said of his wife and stepson, "She telle me, 'Get him to shape up. But if you touch him, I'll kill you.'"

As can be seen in this statement, the double message that many stepparents get is I want your help raising my children, but I want to protect them from you and I resent your interference. Quite often a stepparent will withdraw feeling that there is no way to win. They often end up fearing both the rejection of their spouse and their stepchildren, which might eventuate in a breakup of the newly formed stepfamily.³²

Another part of the difficulty in dealing with the problem of discipline is that the partners assume that they both mean the same things and that they both have the same discipline styles, when, actually, they do not. Premarital

³¹Irene Fast and Morton Chethik, "Stepparents and Their Spouses," in L. Eugene Arnold, ed. Helping Parents Help Their Children (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1978) 296.

³²Capaldi and McRae, 122.

preparation must initiate not only a discussion of what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable (which is what most couples mean by "discipline"), but also what sort of punitive measures will be applied in the case of unacceptable behavior. The Vishers tell us that difficulties with stepparents and discipline are compounded when there are differences in discipline style. And this is usually one of the first areas where stepfamilies experience conflict.³³

Negative Feelings and Anger. In second marriages there is often a greater reluctance to allow negative feelings.³⁴ And some stepparents feel that it is better to avoid negative feelings than to face them squarely.

The work of Richard Gardner indicates that anger is an almost inevitable part of stepfamily living.³⁵ The early days are ones in which many stepchildren need to work through the sadness they inevitably feel as they internalize the realization that their natural parents will never remarry. It is important to accept that all children do cling to a hope that their natural parents will get back together and things will be as they were once. Anne Simon

³³Visher and Visher, "Common Problems," 258.

³⁴Roosevelt and Lofas, 71.

³⁵Richard A. Gardner, Psychotherapy with Children of Divorce (New York: Aronson, 1977) 352-353.

offers this bit of wisdom, which she calls "The Stepchild Primer."

The child wants his mother.
 The child wants his father.
 Their new marriage makes him feel deserted.
 Stepmother can be the enemy or lovable.
 Stepfather can be a rival or an asset.³⁶

One resource for both parents and children is The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce, by Dr. Richard A. Gardner. In his book, Gardner says, "Anger is the feeling that comes out when we want something we cannot have or which we think we cannot have."³⁷ For a parent to be able to share with a child that not having both natural parents may be the source of his or her anger may not be the solution. But accepting that the stepparent is not the source of that anger and accepting that anger as an acceptable feeling may help a stepparent put things into perspective.

Gardner further suggests that anger toward a natural parent may be displaced to a stepparent who is readily available. A stepmother, for example, who is put into the position of taking a major portion of the responsibility for the day to day discipline of a child may receive more than her share of that child's anger.³⁸

³⁶Anne W. Simon, Stepchild in the Family (New York: Odyssey Press, 1964) 197.

³⁷Richard A. Gardner, The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce (New York: Science House, 1970) 59.

³⁸Gardner, 352.

Occasionally children will dump their anger for a natural parent on a stepparent of the same sex.³⁹ If the stepparent can identify this anger as misplaced anger and allow it to come out, she or he can facilitate the healing that needs to take place. Being aware of the tendency of stepchildren to misplace anger can serve as armor for the stepparent and avoid a response in kind to a hurt, confused, and angry child.⁴⁰

June and William Noble report that in their experience there is usually a period at the beginning of a new marriage when the children will test a new stepparent. This, according to their understanding, is a part of the child's need to explore the limits of the newly developing relationship. Again, this is a part of accepting the reality of the remarriage, which is, essentially, accepting the reality and finality of the divorce.⁴¹

To summarize, breaking into a tightly closed system that has been formed between a single parent and a child may be difficult for any stepparent⁴² and any felt or

³⁹Roosevelt and Lofas, 116.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Noble and Noble, 39-40.

⁴²Paul Bohannon and Rosemary Erickson, "Stepping In," Psychology Today 11:8 (January 1978) 54.

imagined discipline restrictions should be discussed as early as possible.⁴³

Some Practical Suggestions

Pastors may wish to offer some practical suggestions to couples coming for premarital preparation. First, be as clear as possible with each other about what your values, goals, and standards will be. Remember that children will try to test those limits. Duffin says,

Decide with your mate what is best for your children and stand by it. It frightens children why they can successfully manipulate adults. It is important for the stepparent to decide what is best for the child without regard to the effect it will have on the child's opinion of him or her.⁴⁴

Second, it may be helpful to remember that many of the discipline problems stepparents face are not unique to stepfamilies.⁴⁵ Every set of natural parents knows how children have learned the technique of divide and conquer. Having a child ask only to be refused by a stepparent and then turn to the natural parent somehow becomes a devastating blow to a new stepparent.

An understanding of child growth and development expectations may be particularly helpful for stepparents

⁴³Block, 101.

⁴⁴Duffin, 20.

⁴⁵Visher and Visher, Stepfamilies, 138.

who have never raised children before. Knowing some of the characteristic problems with adolescents, for example, may help a stepparent shape more realistic expectations.

But behavior problems can take place outside the home as well as inside the home. Certainly one good suggestion is to notify teachers and school officials of a remarriage. They can then be asked to watch for any possible behavior problems that might occur.⁴⁶

Finally, the stepparents should be encouraged not to expect things to be perfect. There will be problems and they are not Superman or Wonder Woman.⁴⁷

Financial Concerns

Family finances form a second major area of concern for reconstituted families.⁴⁸

Messinger found that divorced men were often afraid to talk about their financial obligations while many divorced or widowed women were afraid to speak of their assets.⁴⁹ Even if some couples are reluctant to speak of their financial situation in front of a counselor, they

⁴⁶Capaldi and McRae, 21.

⁴⁷Duffin, 20.

⁴⁸Messinger, 196.

⁴⁹Ibid., 197.

should be encouraged to be completely open with each other before marriage.⁵⁰

A remarriage may create financial tensions and concerns for some. Large alimony and/or child support payments may create financial tensions and concerns, even resentment. Sometimes wives who would otherwise choose to remain at home are forced to work outside the home because their husband's paychecks will not stretch to support two families.⁵¹ Money is often used as a vehicle to express the hostilities that and ex-spouse may feel.⁵²

It is appropriate to suggest legal financial arrangements, including the making of a will, be made even before the wedding.⁵³ While far too little research has been done with regard to the problems that face reconstituted families with older parents whose children are themselves mature adults, the anecdotal evidence is abundantly clear that much grief and step-family discord could be eliminated if persons were encouraged to put their financial matters in order and discuss their financial arrangements openly.

⁵⁰Duffin, 20.

⁵¹Roosevelt and Lofas, 90-91.

⁵²Visher and Visher, Stepfamilies, 102.

⁵³Claire Berman, Making It as a Stepparent (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 97.

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

While most stepfamilies are able to identify the areas of discipline and finances as trouble spots, perhaps the most detrimental forces in a reconstituted family are the unrealistic expectations couples bring to their new marriage. Bobbie Reed says, "Unrealistic expectations are the deadliest enemies of a relationship."⁵⁴

As has been stated above, one of the most prevalent unrealistic expectations that couples carry into their new marriages is that their new reconstituted family will function like a nuclear family.⁵⁵ That includes expecting the same closeness and integration that popular mythology says is supposed to characterize a "normal" (i.e., nuclear) family.⁵⁶ Many stepparents confess that they have allowed themselves to be hounded by the myth of "the Brady Bunch," believing that their families ought to be blended into one big happy family.⁵⁷

Another unrealistic expectation that has been mentioned above and which now should be amplified is that a reconstituted family should become a "family" instantly.

⁵⁴Bobbie Reed, Stepfamilies: Living in Christian Harmony (St. Louis: Concordia, 1980) 19.

⁵⁵Rosevelt and Lofas, 19.

⁵⁶Messinger and Walker, 435.

⁵⁷Roosevelt and Lofas, 15.

In addition, it seems important to help prospective step-parents come to the realization that it is unrealistic to expect their stepchildren to love them immediately or expect themselves to love their stepchildren immediately.⁵⁸ It is important to communicate that love grows over a period of time and cannot be forced or demenaded. "No one tells step-parents that it is okay not to feel 'instant love'."⁵⁹

Stepparents need to come to the realization that they "start out as strangers to the children; how then," asks Anne Simon, "can they expect to be instant parents?"⁶⁰ How, indeed, can a stepparent not feel out of place when she or he has not been involved in the child's life from the beginning? A stepparent must feel as if she or he is starting a few steps behind.⁶¹

It is also important for stepparents to realize that it may take the children a while to "warm up." Gardner cautions that a child who has once been "abandoned" by divorce may be hesitant to form a new relationship.⁶²

⁵⁸Block, 127-130.

⁵⁹Capaldi and McRae, 62.

⁶⁰Simon, 135.

⁶¹Ourselves and Our Children, 29.

⁶²Gardner, 353.

Coming on too strong may overwhelm the child and make it even more difficult for her or him. Gardner says,

The stepparent is well advised to take it slow with the stepchild and let the relationship grow. Overwhelming them with hugs, kisses, luscious praise, gifts, etc., is bound to turn them off and retard, if not squelch, the development of healthy, affectionate relationships.⁶³

Potential stepparents should be advised that it is unrealistic to think that they will never have resentments toward their stepchildren. At times they may long to have their mates to themselves and be angry for having bought into a "package deal." As one stepfather put it, "I fell in love with Jane, not her children. They were a package deal that came with Jane so I knew I had to accept them. It doesn't mean I have to love them."⁶⁴

At times there may be guilty feelings for not really wanting the children.⁶⁵

Another unrealistic expectation that traps many stepparents is that they expect to become "real" parents. Every stepparent must come to grips with the reality that she or he cannot and should not try to take the place of the child's natural parent.

⁶³Ibid., 355.

⁶⁴Lillian Messinger, Kenneth W. Walker, and Stanley Freeman, "Preparation for Remarriage Following Divorce," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 48:2 (April 1978) 270.

⁶⁵Fast and Chetick, 294-295.

Bohannon tells of a friend who married a man whose daughter lived in another country with her grandparents. When this woman and her new husband went to the airport to meet his daughter for the first time, she threw open her arms and said, "I am your new mother." The twelve-year-old girl looked sourly and replied, "The hell you are."⁶⁶

There are no "ex-parents." Each stepparent must find his or her unique place and decide what she or he will be called.⁶⁷

Stepparents must deal with the fact that legally they are "non-parents."⁶⁸ One stepmother cried out,

You think it's stressful for you raising Lynn alone. Well, at least you are the real parent. I care for Aaron full time and still I have no legal rights as a parent. I get frightened when I think his biological mother could take him away from me any time. My commitment to Aaron is as deep as that of any mother who has raised a child for five years. Still I feel he could be snatched from me and I would be crushed.⁶⁹

Some parents hope that a new marriage will solve all their problems.⁷⁰ It is difficult for them to think that

⁶⁶Paul Bohannon, "Divorce Chains, Households of Remarriage and Multiple Divorcers," in his Divorce and After (New York: Doubleday, 1970) 120.

⁶⁷Roosevelt and Lofas, 36-37.

⁶⁸E. M. Rallings, "The Special Role of the Stepfather," Family Coordinator 25:4 (Fall 1976) 466.

⁶⁹Ourselves and Our Children, 169.

⁷⁰Roosevelt and Lofas, 20.

old problems might persist, let alone new ones arise. Wallerstein and Kelly have done extensive studies on the effects of divorce upon children in later latency. Some of these children become very empathic, doting on their parent's every move.⁷¹ It is often this type of child who becomes a co-conspirator with a parent who perpetrates the falsehood that once we are married everything will be just fine. Capaldi and McRae offer us ample evidence that when such a child is involved extra care should be taken to work with the child in premarital preparation. Without preparation, a child who focuses only on the positive aspects of a parent's remarriage will suffer a rude awakening.⁷²

Stepparents who have never raised children before are in for a rude awakening if they expect "thank yous" from their stepchildren.⁷³ Stepparents often fail to realize how thoughtless, inconsiderate, and rude children who live in a nuclear family can be. Many stepmothers feel taken for granted by their stepchildren who gobble up meals, fill up laundry hampers, leave the living room cluttered, only to rush out the door without so much as a "thank you."

⁷¹Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly, "The Effects of Parental Divorce: Experiences of the Child in Later Latency," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 46:2 (April 1976) 266.

⁷²Capaldi and McRae, 45.

⁷³Roosevelt and Lofas, 20.

And many stepfathers feel unappreciated when they dutifully bring home their paychecks to support children that are not even theirs who only seem to ask for more and more.

Finally, it is unrealistic for couples to expect that their mate will not see, communicate, or spend time with an ex-spouse after the marriage. Duberman found that relationships between ex-husbands and remarried wives often improved after her remarriage. While this may be because the alimony payments that the ex-husband made have now ceased, it will be because she now feels stronger, as if she were working from a more secure position.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, as the relationship with an ex-husband may improve for a recently remarried wife, jealousy on the part of the new husband may ensue.⁷⁵ The same may be true for a new wife who sees her husband being manipulated to respond to an ex-wife's every beck and call to come over and make household repairs or deal with problems with his children.

MYTHS

Every work on stepfamilies seems to contain a list of myths surrounding reconstituted families. While some of

⁷⁴ Lucille Duberman, The Reconstituted Family (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1975) 78.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

the more obvious myths have been touched upon already, there are some others that deserve consideration.

Myth: The Death of an Ex-spouse Makes Stepparenting Easier

Children may feel resentment toward their natural parent for abandoning them and displace that anger onto a stepparent.⁷⁶

In addition, there may be ghosts that need to be put to rest.⁷⁷ While consideration of where to live ("your place or mine") is important for any blended family, it may be especially important for a blended family in which the ex-spouse has died. For the pastor to open this consideration as a "neutral" third party may be helpful for a partner who has dreaded living in "her" house.

Myth: Stepchildren Are Easier When They Are Not Living In The Home

Children who are living apart from their natural parent and stepparent may not be subject to the everyday hassles which so often characterize family living, but they can still be a great concern. Many noncustodial parents worry about their children because they are beyond their

⁷⁶Gardner, 351.

⁷⁷Brenda Maddox, The Half-Parent (New York: Evans, 1975) 125.

control. They may live in an environment that the noncustodial parent would not choose. And when they do visit, the noncustodial parent may feel frustrated because she or he has so little time to transmit his or her values to the visiting child.⁷⁸

Berman makes a strong point as she suggests that noncustodial parents must decide if their children will be treated as "visitors or weekend family."⁷⁹ There is abundant evidence to suggest that wise families will plan simple activities that will help children feel a part of the family.

Myth: The Myth of the Cruel Stepmother is Dead

The literature on stepparenting is full of data on the myth of the "cruel stepmother," which is found in almost every culture.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, this myth still survives. Maddox says, "Stepparents feel that the world is watching to see if they will be cruel."⁸¹ She goes on to say that children apologize, even lie to conceal the fact that they have

⁷⁸Visher and Visher, Stepfamilies, 265.

⁷⁹Berman, 75.

⁸⁰Gerda L. Schulman, "Myths that Intrude on the Adaptation of the Stepfamily," Social Casework 49:1 (January 1972) 133.

⁸¹Maddox, 88.

a stepmother because of all the adverse publicity that stepmothers have received.⁸²

Block suggests that titles are so important that family members should begin considering how they will be addressed (mom, dad, stepfather, stepmother, Tom, Jane, stepdaughter, etc.) before marriage even though that matter may not be settled until quite sometime after the marriage has taken place.⁸³

THREE FINAL AREAS OF CONCERN

While there are many other areas of concern for stepfamilies, three final areas of concern will be briefly mentioned.

Incest

The subject of incest is a very important issue for consideration with a reconstituted family. Schulman suggests that it may be best discussed in premarital preparation because at that time it can be objectified and talked about in a somewhat less threatening, abstract fashion.⁸⁴

⁸²Ibid., 32-33.

⁸³Block, 87-88.

⁸⁴Schulman, 137.

Incest is most often thought of in a stepfather-stepdaughter relationship. But in stepfamilies the sexual tensions between opposite sex children is often an area of great anxiety. Berman gives one example:

Pity the poor adolescent again. Struggling with her own emerging sexuality, she finds further complication in the availability of a love object--a stepbrother--whom society tells her she must not regard romantically. In defense, she does the opposite. She declares he is anathema to her and the battle is on.⁸⁵

In any case, clear guidelines must be set and a "hands off" attitude must be held. Setting standards for areas of privacy (no girls in the boys' bedroom after 9 p.m., for example) or stages of dress or undress may be important.

But Schulman's studies suggest that the implications of incestuous feelings (Oedipal material) may be quite subtle and pervasive. With a stepfather and stepdaughter, the child's mother may harbor a secret fear that the stepfather will find the adolescent stepdaughter more desirable. Schulman says,

In some families the mother's rejection of, or even expulsion of, her daughter during adolescence is related to this fantasy, as is the stepfather's withdrawal and overcritical attitude during the period of the child's growing up. At best, the stepfather often finds himself caught between his wife's wanting him to show interest in her daughter and his fear that such interest will be misconstrued or that his impulses will not stand the strain of closeness.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Berman, 142.

⁸⁶Schulman, 133.

In Schulman's understanding it is not in setting household rules or dress codes but in the husband and wife both having enough ego strength and being able to reassure each other of their love that incest is resisted.⁸⁷

Noncustodial Parents

While the focus of premarital preparation is certainly on the reconstituted family, the relationship between the stepchild (or children), stepparent, natural parent and the natural noncustodial parent must be considered at some point as well. In some cases it may be appropriate to see the noncustodial parent as a part of the premarital preparation process. A noncustodial parent needs to be reassured that his or her children will continue to love him or her.⁸⁸ Studies of children of divorce indicate that they need to have continuing contact with both parents.⁸⁹ Premarital preparation may be the time to reaffirm the noncustodial parent's right to see his or her children. At the same time, children need to be reassured that they have the capacity to grow to love a new stepparent and continue to love both their natural parents as well. At the time of the

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Edith Atkin and Estelle Rubin, Part-Time Father (New York: Vanguard Press, 1976) 124-125.

⁸⁹Messinger and Walker, 432.

wedding, when so many are giving gifts, a noncustodial parent can give a great gift to her or his children--permission to like the new person in their lives.⁹⁰

Honeymoon Plans

Finally, the couple should be encouraged to have some time alone following their wedding. A honeymoon should be just that, and not a family vacation.⁹¹ Time and space should be organized so that there will be privacy for the couple. And couples should be encouraged to have regular "get away times." These can be regular events, such as a night out without the children, but they should also include special weekends away from the family.

There are many areas of concern that we have not covered, but these form a statement of some of the problem areas most often identified by stepparents and some of the solutions most often advanced.

A GROWTH PERSPECTIVE

Unfortunately, the tenor of this chapter may be one of more gloom and doom than really is the case. This chapter would not have been written had it not been for a

⁹⁰Atkin and Rubin, 124-125.

⁹¹Capaldi and McRae, 136.

concern for those struggling within the parameters of reconstituted families and a firm belief that those who come to the church to be married and enter reconstituted families possess huge amounts of untapped potential resources for growth which will allow them to meet the challenges of step-family living. This growth perspective sees the need to challenge potential stepparents to look realistically at the difficulties they will face and then to equip them with some of the resources they will need.

Here the church can be an invaluable ally by offering small groups and workshops for stepparents. Such groups, whether they are short-term groups or workshops led by experts or ongoing self-help groups, have two benefits. First, they offer an opportunity for stepparents (and possibly even stepchildren) to hear that the problems they are having are the same problems others are having. As one participant said, "I feel so much better just knowing we're not abnormal." The other benefit, particularly in on-going groups, is that stepparents can get to know couples who have successfully made it through the same problems they are currently facing. This cannot be over-estimated as a need. Stepparents need to know that others have come out on the other side of the problems they are currently facing to find a reconstituted family life-style that is mutually fulfilling for its members. Members of reconstituted families can grow to love one another and find joy in their life together.

It is out of this potential, this hope, this promise, that premarital preparation with reconstituted families is undertaken.

Chapter V

THE STRUCTURE AND FLOW OF THE PREMARITAL SESSIONS

GOALS

The design I have chosen allows for four premarital sessions of one and one-half to two hours. Obviously, we are free to contract for a longer period of time should the need arise. Essentially I have chosen six goals, but because of the flexible nature of the premarital sessions, not all six may be accomplished with every couple and with some couples other goals may be substituted.

1. To build a relationship with the couple that will make available the resources of the pastor and the church following the wedding.

This is mentioned first because it is both the least that can be done and yet perhaps the most important thing that can be done.¹ Many couples have returned after their marriage for counseling stating that they did not know where else to turn.

2. To allow the couple an opportunity to examine their present relationship and to begin to form their future relationship.

¹Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling for Marriage Enrichment (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 53.

In short, the attempt here is to create some psychological space in the midst of a frenzied round of activities so that the couple can begin to plan for the future and begin shaping their future relationship in an intentional way. Many couples drift into marriage only to continue to drift farther and farther apart. Once the process is begun, most couples enjoy it immensely.

3. To provide the couple with an opportunity to examine their understanding of marriage in general, their parents' marriages, their previous marriage(s), and their expectations for their coming marriage.

Much of the current literature reflects the necessity of exploring the understandings of marriage held by one's family as a way of exploring the "baggage" one brings to a new marriage.² This would seem to be especially important in the case of one who has been previously married.

4. To assist the couple as they anticipate the problems facing them as members of a reconstituted family and to acquaint them with some resources for meeting those problems.

While there are no specific lectures or experiential learning techniques designed to accomplish this goal, the information which the pastor has gained, as well as her or his knowledge of helpful books on the subject, may be fed

²Charles A. Wood, "Premarital Counseling: A Working Model," Journal of Pastoral Care 33:1 (March 1979) 44.

into the process as needed. Because there is so much variation between family situations no specific plans are suggested here, only the general guideline that the pastor should raise the issues she or he feels to be relevant to the family if the couple does not initiate the discussion.

5. To communicate some good, straight information about sex and sexuality.

One cannot assume that because a couple has been previously married (or perhaps even currently living together) that they have all the knowledge they need, or even more importantly, that they can communicate their sexual desires to each other.

6. To assist the couple as they prepare for the wedding ceremony, which may include helping them write their own ceremony or interpreting the traditional service and to initiate a discussion of the spiritual dimensions of marriage.

THE FIRST SESSION

Introductions

During the first session I work hard to let the couple know me as well as getting to know them. I usually ask, if I do not know them already, to have them introduce their partner to me. I usually ask how they met and when they decided to marry. I work hard to alleviate the fears

they may have about being judged as to their readiness for marriage.

During this initial session we agree upon the times and dates for the sessions and I outline the goals and desing for the process. I make it clear that this is their time as well as mine and encourage them to raise any problems or issues that they would like to deal with at any point in the process.

Communication in Marriage

After a mini-lecture on good, clear communication, I introduce a learning experience I have adapted from the Intentional Marriage Method.³ I ask the couple to sit facing each other and alternate finishing the sentence, "I appreciate (in you) . . . " Usually this takes some coaching. When the couple seems to have finished I ask them to debrief the experience. I may reflect that this is hard for most couples because we are not used to verbalizing our appreciation of one another. Yet this is very important.

Next I discuss the need for being able to express what you want from each other. At this point I give each person some paper and a pen and ask them to finish the sentence, "I need from you . . . " If I have the feeling

³Clinebell, 12-13.

that their statements are too general, I may direct them to think about their present relationship. I may give them some concrete examples such as, "I need you to spend more time with me!" or, "I need you to tell me what you want so that I don't always have to guess." After making separate lists, the couple is asked to share their lists, making note of any areas where there are agreements, disagreements, or simply differences (items mentioned by only one of the partners). At this point I usually allow the couple to debrief the experience thus far before proceeding on to the next step. In the final stage, the couple is encouraged to choose one item and decide together how they will work on it. If a concrete situation presents itself, I will ask the couple to write out a plan of action. If no concrete situation is available (and frequently there is not an issue suitable), I simply reflect on the steps in the process as a way of "contracting" to state clearly what one needs and to move toward dealing with that need.

Homework

For the first three sessions I have some specific bit of "homework." In the first session I ask each couple to read a copy of Equal Marriage,⁴ which I give them as a gift, before the next session.

⁴Jean Stapleton and Richard Bright, Equal Marriage (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

Once again I reflect on the need for good, clear verbal communication. But I also introduce a rudimentary understanding of non-verbal communication. We close with an exercise in non-verbal communication.

I ask the couple to stand facing each other with their eyes closed. Then, allowing enough time for each movement, I ask them to reach out and find their partner's hands and without speaking say hello to those hands, explore those hands, feel the strength of those hands, fight with those hands, make up with those hands, say I love you to those hands, say goodbye to those hands, and gently open their eyes when they are ready.

THE SECOND SESSION

Role Models and Role Expectations

At the beginning of each of the subsequent sessions we spend a few minutes at the opening simply reconnecting. I may ask them about their plans for the wedding, how they felt after the previous session, or simply how things are between them.

The main thrust of this session is to examine some of the role modeling and role expectations that couples bring to their marriage. Usually by this point I have a good idea as to how much awareness they have of the potential problems that they may face as stepparents and we may

spend almost the entire session discussing the problems that are before them.

I may also use some of the material in Equal Marriage as a springboard for a discussion of the division of household chores, sex-roles, and child-rearing. (It is especially important to inquire into the specificity of their plan for disciplining the children.)

With some couples it may be important to explore the relationship they had with their former husband or wife and their general pattern of life-style to help the couple come to understand some of the unspoken expectations they bring to marriage. In some cases it may be helpful, as is often the case with couples who have not been previously married, to explore some of the role expectations and understandings of marriage that they saw modeled in their own family of origin. With some couples I have used the following exercise which was adapted from one designed by James.⁵

What did you observe about your parents' marriage?
how they expressed affection
how they used leisure time
how they used alcohol or drugs
other elements of their marriage

How has this affected your own ideas about marriage?

What did your own mother/father/other parental figure say about

⁵Muriel James, Marriage Is for Loving (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979) 49, 51.

whom to marry
 when to marry
 what marriage would be like

In using this exercise I have found it important to have the pastor share openly about her or his own family experience as a way of beginning the discussion.

Giving some couples cognitive handles to help them think about their relationship may be important. A brief overview of the basic concepts of transactional analysis,⁶ Virginia Satir's four patterns of communicating and the associated body positions,⁷ or her concept of mirror images,⁸ may whet the couple's interest for thinking more directly about their relationship.

With couples who have been living together before marriage it may be important to explore their feelings and fears about their change in status. Many couples who have been living together before marriage expect that there will be no difference in their relationship after marriage. Jay Haley points out that often rather sudden shifts in behavior occur after the marriage takes place with couples

⁶Eric Berne, Games People Play (New York: Grove Press, 1964) 24 ff.

⁷Virginia Satir, Peoplemaking (Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books, 1972) 59 ff.

⁸Virginia Satir, Conjoint Family Therapy (Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books, 1967) 100.

who have not been living together prior to marriage.⁹

Surprisingly enough, the anecdotal evidence is that this may occur even among those who have lived together prior to marriage. Perhaps it is because even couples who lived together before marriage have been on their best behavior.

Family Finances

Usually during this session I initiate a discussion of family finances. As stated above, for reconstituted families finances can be an especially burdensome problem. Discussions as to who handles the money, will there be separate checking accounts, who is responsible for the financial welfare of the children, and whether or not my money will be used to make your alimony payments should be initiated as early as possible.

Grief and Recovery: Readiness for a New Marriage

At some point, although not necessarily in the second session, it is important to inquire into the couple's feelings about their past marriage(s). Clinebell finds there to be two essential steps that must be taken as one moves from one relationship and prepares to enter another.

⁹Jay Haley, "Marriage Therapy," in Gerald D. Erickson and Terrance P. Hogan, eds., Family Therapy (New York: Aronson, 1976) 185.

First, the "grief work," the working through of the anger, resentment, guilt, and sense of failure that accompanied the loss of the previous relationship, must be completed.¹⁰ And second, the ability to use this painful loss as a growth opportunity.¹¹ Checking with the couple to see if they have made peace with the past, if they are able to speak openly about their past relationships, and if they have consolidated significant learnings from the past may give clues as to whether the previous marriage has been put to rest. Another clue may be to inquire if any sort of counseling was obtained during or following a divorce or death of a spouse.

Wayne Oates is correct, I believe, when he says that the loss of someone through divorce, although not identical, is akin to the loss of someone through death.¹² To recall the signs of pathological grief reactions may be helpful when a pastor receives mixed signals from a couple.

One of the questions I often ask is, how much time has passed since you separated from your ex-spouse (or your wife/husband died)? Oates suggests that couples should wait

¹⁰Howard J. Clinebell, "Premarital Counseling: Religious Dimensions," in Robert F. Stahmann and William J. Hiebert, eds., Klemer's Counseling in Marital and Sexual Problems (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1977) 328.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Wayne E. Oates, Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 1.

a year after legal termination of a marriage before starting to think about remarriage.¹³ But some couples have been separated for years before they legally receive a divorce. I, too, used to use the same rule of thumb--a year--but recently I have found it more valuable (and more accurate) to follow my own hunches about the persons involved. Certainly, if only a short time has elapsed, one might wonder if this were a marriage "on the rebound." But there are other indicators that I have found to be even more significant.

One is an over-idealized image of either the present partner or the ex-spouse. Both seem to be indicators that the past relationship has not been fully terminated and there is grief work still to be done. Some time ago a couple came to me for premarital preparation. When she said, "Oh, he's perfect, just like my late husband!" he exclaimed, "I'm not at all like him." He got the message, and they decided to wait to get married.

Switzer, speaking of grief following the loss of a love one through death says,

Effective mourning involves not only certain aspects of relinquishing the lost person, but also of allowing those aspects of the other person which through identification have become a part of the very selfhood

¹³Ibid. 26.

of the bereaved to become fully alive, and of receiving the lost person in a new way. When this begins to happen, grief work is moving toward its conclusion.¹⁴

In an even more profound way, since an ex-spouse is likely to still be around when there are children involved, a divorced person must move through the anger and negative feelings to see that person (as well as him or herself) in a new way. The importance of this cannot be over-stated or under estimated.

Homework

At the end of this session I give the couples a copy of The Pleasure Bond and make specific assignments. Usually this includes Chapter 9, "Second Marriages."¹⁵ For interested couples I provide a short bibliography of the best books I have found on stepparenting and living in reconstituted families.

THE THIRD SESSION

Sex and Sexuality

After some reconnecting time, I give each person a piece of paper and a pen (myself included). Working

¹⁴David K. Switzer, The Minister as Crisis Counselor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) 165.

¹⁵William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, The Pleasure Bond (New York: Bantam, 1976) 207-243.

separately, we write down, using single words or short phrases, whatever comes into our minds when I say the word sex. After working alone we all share our lists. The next step is to identify those attitudes or feelings that we have written that are negative and those that are positive.¹⁶ If it is appropriate, these may be related back to the discussion from the previous session on parental roles. Generally this leads to a discussion of the formation of our attitudes and where we got most of our early sex education. Here the pastor's openness and willingness to share his or her own experiences is very helpful. This seems to lead naturally to a discussion of some of the myths surrounding sex.

Myths

1. Some things are better left unsaid.

Even today this is a very common attitude. Women still tell me that what they really need is for their husbands to communicate with them about sex. And men tell me that it is difficult for them to talk about sex with their wives, even though they would very much like to do just that. With couples who are sexually active before

¹⁶Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling, Part I: Enriching Marriage and Family Life (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), Audio Tape: Course IV, Side A, "Enhancing Sexual Intimacy."

marriage the issue may have already become a problem and the opening of this kind of discussion may be just the prodding needed.

2. Sex should always be completely spontaneous and natural.

Besides the obvious issues, this may be an opportunity to discuss contraception. While it is quite likely that the issue of contraception and the number of children desired (if any) has probably been discussed, but one should not assume that it has.

3. In sex you must be completely unselfish.

In addition to the concept of temporary "selfishness," this may be an appropriate time to introduce non-demand pleasuring.¹⁷

4. There is only one right way to have sex.

This may lead to a discussion of oral/genital sex or the use of variety as the spice of love making. It may also be appropriate to introduce some more inhibited couples to The Joy of Sex¹⁸ and More Joy of Sex¹⁹ and give

¹⁷Helen Singer Kaplan, The New Sex Therapy (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1974) 131 ff.

¹⁸Alex Comfort, The Joy of Sex (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

¹⁹Alex Comfort, More Joy of Sex (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

them permission to experiment for themselves.

5. A man always wants and is ready for sex.

With mature couples it is important to discuss problems and fears related to loss of erection, empathetically stating that almost all men experience loss of erection from time to time. While it seems improbable that a couple would be experiencing sexual dysfunction at this time, premarital preparation is an opportunity to encourage couples to engage in counseling and/or sex therapy should they have difficulties with their sexual adjustment.

6. Masturbation will cause cancer, mental illness, hairy hands, etc.

Here is the place for a frank discussion of some of the old tales about masturbation and the place of masturbation in marriage.

7. When it comes to orgasms all men/women are the same.

Even with previously married women there may be those who are not sure if their orgasms are all they should be. There is so much written and so much information that leads one to believe that there is only one experience of orgasm that this myth must be finally put to rest.

8. Simultaneous orgasms are the supreme sexual achievement.

Sex manuals in the past have touted simultaneous orgasm to the point where it seemed mandatory for the ultimate experience in sexual satisfaction. It is also, I believe, one of the contributing factors in "spectatoring," or that experience in which one does not allow oneself to become fully involved (lost) in the experience itself, but responds to a need to stand outside the experience and orchestrate sex so that it can come to its appropriate end--a simultaneous climax for both partners. This is an especially big trap for men who feel that their wife's satisfaction is completely their responsibility. For a man who has adopted the attitude, "it's performance that counts," in other parts of life, it seems only natural that this attitude would spill over into the rest of life. Russell Dick writes,

Men who are failing in business and competition often lose their sexual potency. . . . It is not money or the things that money can buy for which he struggles; it is the need to succeed. Men say, 'I was working for her and the children.' Such claims are only partially true. Men work to fulfill their need to succeed.²⁰

9. With a penis, the bigger the better.

Bernie Zilbergeld has a chapter in one of his books entitled, "It's Two Feet Long, Hard As Steel, and Can Go

²⁰Russell Dicks, Premarital Guidance (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963) 56.

All Night."²¹ While that indeed might be every man's fantasy, Masters and Johnson found no relation between penis size and virility or a man's ability to give pleasure to a woman during intercourse.²² Another mistaken idea about penis size is that larger men have larger penises. Masters and Johnson found no relation between a man's size and the size of his penis.²³

10. You should not have sex during pregnancy/menstruation.

Masters and Johnson report that coition may take place even in the third trimester without damage to the pregnancy.²⁴

While most of these myths are not new material for most couples, this device allows us to have a good time and do some sex education as well. This is not an exhaustive list, so I invite the couple to contribute any myths they know. Couples are also warned that just because one is aware of a myth is no sign that one is free from its power.

²¹Bernie Zilbergeld, Male Sexuality (New York: Bantam, 1978) 23 ff.

²²Fred Belliveau and Lin Richter, Understanding Human Sexual Inadequacy (New York: Bantam, 1970) 54.

²³Ibid., 55.

²⁴William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, Human Sexual Response (Boston: Brown Little, 1966) 167.

Some Suggestions for Enhancing Sex Life

As an introduction to the final phase, I usually say something such as, "I am sure you've had a good sex education, but some couples I see have not. So, I always make it a point to share some of the ways people can enhance their sex life." The following suggestions were offered by Dr. Howard Clinebell.²⁵

1. Internalize more sex-affirmative attitudes.

Here the couple is encouraged to look back at their list of words and phrases compiled in the exercise earlier in this session and decide what sex-negative attitudes they would like to change into sex-affirmative attitudes.

2. Keep your total relationship and sex life growing and they will both tend to improve.
3. Discover and remove areas of injustice or inequality of opportunity in your marriage.
4. Keep the wall of accumulated hurts and resentments down; get reconnected emotionally before you try to make love.
5. Let your child side come out and play regularly.
6. Use your imagination to keep sex adventuresome; vary the setting or re-eroticize the usual one.
7. Practice positive communication; discover what you enjoy and coach each other in giving that.

²⁵Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling for Mid-Years Couples (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977) 51-58.

8. Maximize your enjoyment of each of the four stages: excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution.
9. Enjoy leisurely, non-demand pleasuring regularly.
10. Avoid the triple traps of hurry, fatigue, or too much booze.
11. Affirm each other regularly; appreciation is the language of love.

Homework

Usually during the first session I invite the couple to consider writing their own wedding ceremony. If they choose to do that, part of the homework assignment for this session will be to complete that and have it ready for the next session. In addition, I invite the couple to consider any areas that we have not discussed together and bring in any questions that they might have next time.

THE FOURTH SESSION

Planning the Wedding Ceremony

The first order of business will be to deal with any left over business from the previous sessions. This is followed by a discussion of the wedding plans and the meaning of the wedding service with a review of the order of worship.

Meeting Spiritual Needs

With some couples I may use the following exercise for opening a discussion of spiritual needs.

My life has the most (least meaning, hope, and energy when--

The values that are exciting and really worth living for are--

I feel most alive when--

The beliefs that I now affirm as true and important are--

The beliefs from my childhood religion that no longer make sense to me are--

The way I feel about the church is--

To strengthen and deepen my spiritual life, I need to--

The way I feel about discussing this question is--²⁶

At some point I may feel it appropriate to ask why they chose to get married in a church, particularly this church.

I find it helpful to keep in mind this list of basic spiritual-existential needs.

(1) The need for a viable philosophy of life, a belief system that will give one's existence meaning and purpose; (2) the need for clear values and priorities to serve as inner guidelines to behavior that is personally and socially constructive; (3) the need for an integrating relationship with and commitment to that which is seen as ultimately real and significant--

²⁶Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling: Hope-Centered Methods of Actualizing Human Wholeness (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979) 117.

called 'God' in conventional religious language; (4) the need for an ecological consciousness, a sense of trustful, organic belonging to humanity and to the biosphere; (5) the need for the renewal which comes from regular moments of transcendence or 'peak experiences'; (6) the need to develop one's uniquely human or spiritual potentialities--i.e., one's capacities for self-transcendence, creativity, awareness, altruism, responsible freedom, and communion with the highest; and (7) the need for a community of caring which undergrids one's world view and values by means of shared rituals, beliefs, and religious practices.²⁷

In closing, we affirm together that we will meet for an evaluation in three to six months. At this time I invite any evaluation they might like to offer and ask if there are any issues we still need to cover. I like to close with this statement.

Intimacy is the interlocking of two individual persons joined by a bond which partially overcomes their separateness. In the fullest expression of intimacy there is a vertical dimension, a sense of relatedness to the universe which both strengthens the marital relationship and is strengthened by it. . . . No single factor does more to give a marriage joy or keep it both a venture and an adventure in mutual fulfillment than shared commitment to spiritual discovery.²⁸

CONCLUSION

Obviously, there is much more that could be added to an arsenal of techniques for premarital preparation and

²⁷Clinebell, "Premarital Counseling," 319-320.

²⁸Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., and Charlotte H. Clinebell, The Intimate Marriage (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) 179.

not all of the suggested techniques we have listed are used with every couple. They are presented here for just what they are, tools to be used in appropriate places. In former times we have looked upon premarital preparation as a device essentially to meet our need as pastors to feel that we had adequately counseled each couple coming to us prior to their marriage. Now the emphasis has shifted to where it rightly belongs--with the need of those who come to be married.

To this point I have not attempted to define the overall goal of premarital preparation. To close this chapter I would like to offer this statement. It is written by one whose influence is seen throughout this project.

The overall goal of the process is to provide continuing opportunities, coaching, and reinforcement for each couple as they create their own unique, mutually actualizing relationship. Relationships which liberate couples to use their full gifts in mutually enhancing ways are open, intimate, equal relationships with the intentional commitment to each other's growth. Such a liberating or potentializing marriage is one in which both persons grow toward what in biblical language is called 'life' in all its fullness.²⁹

²⁹Clinebell, "Premarital Counseling," 319.

Chapter VI

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

DIFFICULTIES IN EVALUATING THE PROJECT

Having just read the previous chapter one might ask how one is to accomplish all these tasks in a given period of six to eight hours of premarital preparation. It seems worth reiterating the answer which is simply that not all of these exercises are used with all couples. In fact, with any given six couples, as was the case in testing this design, the choices might be very different. Often this will mean picking and choosing areas to be explored based on the pastor's perceptions of the couple. Not infrequently this will mean completely setting aside the design to work with the issues raised by the couple, moving to the mode of problem-solving counseling. The emphasis, or focus, is upon the couple and their needs, not the need of the pastor to make sure that the couple has been adequately counseled prior to their marriage.

Because this means that in the course of every premarital preparation there will be major adjustments resulting in major differences between the experiences of each of the couples with whom the design is used, the task of evaluating the process has been made much more difficult. Despite the difficulties, I feel I must attempt to

evaluate the work done in this project, just as all of our work as pastors must be critically evaluated.

Early in the first session, while outlining the process and the goals, the couples agreed to have four sessions before the wedding and a fifth session after they had been married for at least three months for the purpose of evaluating the design.

THE EVALUATION SESSION

The follow-up session involved five couples. Six couples had begun the series of premarital preparations sessions, but one couple decided not to get married, essentially over issues relating to becoming stepparents. (Unfortunately, both members of that pair have moved out of the state and there has been no way to receive their evaluation.) The five remaining couples had been married from three to eleven months at the time of the follow-up session. To protect the anonymity of these couples, to whom I am grateful for their willingness to be a part of this project, a numbering system has been devised, arbitrarily giving the number 1 to the couple that had been married the longest, designating the husband as M-1 and the wife as F-1. The other couples have been numbered in a similar fashion according to their relative position.

Profiles of the Couples

C-1 has been married for eleven months. M-1 is 36, has two children from a previous marriage who are living outside the home. F-1 is also 36, and has four children, one of whom is married and another who lives with an ex-spouse. She has custody of her two youngest children. They had lived together for two years before coming for pre-marital preparation.

C-2 has been married for nine months. M-2 is 31, and F-2 is 28. This is his first marriage. She has one child from her only previous marriage.

C-3 has been married for nearly six months. M-3 is 28, and this is his first marriage. F-3 has two pre-school children of whom she has custody. She is 31. She has had a very poor relationship with her ex-husband since their divorce.

C-4 has been married for four months. M-4 is 48 and has been married twice before. He has four children, three of whom are married. His youngest child, a son, is a pre-teen who lives with his mother. F-4 is 36, has two children, one of whom lives in her own apartment and the other lives at home.

C-5 has been married for three months. M-5 is 29 and has custody of his three-year-old son. F-5 is 33 and has custody of two teenage daughters. F-5 was first

married when she was 16 and remained in her first marriage until she was 28.

Interview Data

Because of the diverse nature of the design used for premarital preparation with each couple, as stated above, it was judged to be impossible to develop an objective instrument (if indeed such an instrument exists) to use with all the couples. An alternate plan was used. During the follow-up session the couples were asked to respond to the following seven questions which were interwoven into the discussion.

1. What was the most important learning for you?
What do you remember most from the process?
2. What was the least interesting or helpful part of the process?
3. What, if anything, would you change or leave out of the process?
4. How well were the goals spelled out? Did you understand the goals? Were the goals met?
5. Would you come to the church (pastor) if you had problems in your marriage?
6. Did the premarital preparation sessions help you anticipate any problems you might have as step-parents?
7. Did the premarital sessions assist you to examine your relationship and plan for the future?

Responses to Interview Questions

Rather than present verbatim reports of each of the follow-up sessions, I have selected some of the responses to the questions which seem to be most helpful and insightful for the purpose of evaluation.

1. What was the most important learning for you? What do you remember most from the process?

Three of the couples (C-1, C-2, and C-4) said that the first session was the most important one for them. They were not sure what was going to happen so they were relieved and excited by the communication exercises. F-4 said, "I couldn't believe it, he just couldn't wait for the next session."

M-3 reported that the third session, in which we spoke extensively of some of the potential problems for stepparents was the most helpful to him.

Ironically enough, C-5 had the most difficulty remembering much in detail.

2. What was the least interesting or helpful part of the process?

All of the couples had a hard time answering this question. I am led to make two speculations: either they were (1) afraid of offending me with negative comments or (2) they had no other models on which to make a judgment.

C-3 and C-5 stated that the least interesting session was the last one, but C-5 qualified their statement by saying that it might have been the case because the final session was scheduled right before the rehearsal and they were more concerned with the actual plans for the wedding at that point.

3. What, if anything, would you change or leave out of the process?

This is very close to the previous question and received much the same response, possibly for the reasons listed above. M-4 replied that he would only add more. C-3 inquired about marriage growth experiences.

4. How well were the goals spelled out? Did you understand the goals? Were the goals met?

This question revealed one of the great problems of this project, namely, that the goals were never adequately shared with the couples. It was implied, rather, that one's understanding of the process would reveal the goals of premarital preparation. When this question was asked I received blank stares or questions of clarification from all five couples.

5. Would you come to the church (pastor) if you had problems in your marriage?

C-1 had already come for counseling during a particularly stressful period while a custody suit was

being settled. They said that they had come because they felt a rapport with the pastor and because they literally did not know where else to turn. F-3 said that she would come as long as I was the pastor, but judgments past that point would be based on her perceptions of the pastor's skills and sensitivities. M-4 stated that he would not come to our church because his mother was a member of our church, but he would search out another minister in the community where he now lives. F-2 reported that she had sought counseling from a minister at the time of her divorce.

6. Did the premarital preparation sessions help you anticipate any problems you might have as stepparents?

All of the couples, except C-1 (who had been living together before they were married), stated that they were shocked by some of the statistics I shared with them and that caused them to look more closely at the problems they might face. M-3, who tends to be very unrealistic about many things, felt he would have no problems, but has had several problems adjusting to life in a reconstituted family. M-1 stated that he had not expected as many conflicts with his wife's family and her ex-spouse as they had experienced. He suggested even more emphasis be placed on problems with ex-spouses and with finances.

C-4 and C-5 were asked if the tone of the comments on the problems of stepfamilies seemed too negative. M-4 replied that he did not. He responded, "after all, forewarned is forearmed." F-4 said that she was "a little nervous" when they were first married because she had come to anticipate problems. C-5 stated that they especially appreciated the emphasis on the fallacy of "love me, love my child."

7. Did the premarital sessions assist you to examine your relationship and plan for the future?

C-5 stated that it did not, but earlier in the evening they reported that they especially liked the communication exercises and said that they felt they were able to communicate better. F-2 and F-3 reported that it caused them to examine their relationship with their own parents and with their partner's family. F-3 still anticipates problems with her mother-in-law. M-3 stated that he felt more comfortable talking about sex, although he is still somewhat shy and inhibited.

CRITIQUE OF THE EVALUATION

There were several problems with such a subjective evaluation that I found. If I were to do the evaluation again I would use some sort of objective instrument, at least to evaluate my part in the process. The fact that I

was interested enough in the couple and their evaluation of the project to make an appointment to see them in their homes probably prejudiced them in favor of not making any harshly critical comments.

While I have come to believe in the follow-up session after the wedding, I believe that each session should be evaluated at the end of the session rather than relying solely on an evaluation done three or more months later.

From the process of holding the evaluation session at various lengths of time after the wedding, I would like to draw two conclusions. First, while it is undoubtedly wiser to receive the evaluation as close to the time of the premarital sessions as possible so that the material will be fresh in the minds of the participants, often it is still later that the couples will encounter problems and really feel the need of some support. Regular check-ups seem to be wise. Second, while for the purpose of this project the main purpose of the follow-up was to evaluate this design for premarital preparation, it is imperative to keep in mind that the purpose of the follow-up session is to be able to inquire into the well-being of the couple and to offer the assistance of the resources of the church if needed. One follow-up session brought a couple to church who had never attended before. Seeing the couples again and being able to be in touch with their

interests and concerns was a highly satisfying experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most telling criticism is that none of the couples could clearly state what the goals of the premarital preparation sessions (or even the overall goals of the entire design) were. This is not just a revelation of the fact that these goals were never stated clearly in a coherent fashion, but symptomatic of a deeper problem.

At each point, through each session, there were major issues (or ideas) that I had hoped to communicate. Unfortunately, these were never tied into the statement of purpose or goals either of the individual session or the entire process. This is an educative design and there are what might be called "master images" or "big ideas" as well as detailed information that, hopefully, will be communicated. The importance of this is that even after much of the detailed information has been lost in the memory of the individuals, hopefully, the big ideas (such as the church being a place of help and the pastor a resource) will remain. It is obvious that to a limited extent this did happen. But this would have been accomplished much more systematically had this educational concept been considered and built into the design in a more intentional fashion.

An even more fundamental criticism is that despite my attempts to be open to the needs of the couple, the

design was still mine and I was asking the couple primarily to respond to my need to communicate various bits of information to them. At some point early in the first session there should have been some way of attempting to assess their needs and truly contracting with the couple as a way of practically demonstrating that this is their time, as well as mine, and to have them practice contracting with me. Then each session could be evaluated in terms of both how well we met their needs and mine and how much effort we all put into the process. Then the question would become, were we really trying or just going through the motions?

This cannot be overestimated as a need for couples coming to marriage. We must teach persons coming to marriage the arts of negotiating with each other. Using every concrete opportunity we have to teach the couple contracting by having them actually do contracting will make our teaching more effective. One good example of this is Mitman's use of the couple's budget for the wedding to demonstrate not only financial planning but the use of contracting techniques as well.¹

As stated above, this project involves the creation and testing of an educational desing. Counseling skills

¹John L. C. Mitman, Premarital Counseling (New York: Seabury Press, 1980) 59.

are or may be needed at some points, but primarily this is an educative design. As such, it is the creation of the designer. And as the designer, I have used techniques with which I feel comfortable. Various tools, such as premarital inventories or personality tests were not included purely because they did not seem to help me achieve my goals. By their exclusion I do not want to imply that other methods or learning tools have no place in premarital preparation. From time to time I do use other techniques and even premarital tests and personality inventories.

This design, I have no doubt, will continue to be revised. It is offered here to all who might wish to use it or adapt it for their own use.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

This project began in October, 1979, as an attempt to reexamine my premarital preparation practices. Slightly more than one year later, in November, 1980, I was to be the co-leader of a workshop for stepparents. At the end of an exciting day, the participants of that workshop, almost as with one voice cried out, "Why didn't someone tell us what we were getting into before we got married?"

It was out of that exciting experience of learning about the problems and joys of reconstituted family living and feeling of being utterly inadequate to do premarital preparation with those persons who would be entering reconstituted families that the concept of applying some of the new understandings of premarital preparation that I had gained to the special needs of such families emerged. The months that were to follow would see me searching through the literature of stepparenting, speaking with many stepparents both informally and in counseling, and testing various designs with colleagues and with couples coming for premarital preparation.

By way of conclusion I would like to reiterate three of what have been the most valuable learnings for me. While these have been mentioned above, they are so central

to this project that it seems worthwhile mentioning them again.

First, and this is mentioned first because it is central in my newly emerging understanding of premarital preparation, premarital work with couples must be undertaken to meet the needs of those entering reconstituted families and not the pastor's need to be able to say that the couple has been adequately counseled prior to their marriage. As stated above, this conclusion has given me the freedom to abandon the design, which, paradoxically, is also the freedom to use the design comfortably. Even more work will be done to insure that the needs of the couple are being met and that the concerns the couple brings to each session are being adequately addressed.

Second, is the insight that marriage today is viewed not as one of the givens of society. No longer can it be assumed that even a majority of the society at large assumes that persons will marry and having married that they will stay married to the same person forever. Nor are the roles within marriage defined in terms of society's expectations, given one's gender. In short, marriage is seen by most couples as a contractual relationship which they must define. Written at the bottom of the contract is the understanding that the purpose of marriage is not for the propagation of the species or the maintenance of society, but for the mutual fulfillment of both partners.

In the past, society has worried that if this should ever become the predominant model for marriage there would be a sky-rocketing divorce rate and the very institution of marriage might be in danger of being lost. While there is a high divorce rate today, this has not destroyed the desire of persons to marry. (If this were the case we would not have as many reconstituted families.) Even Jessie Bernard, who represents a basically pessimistic view of marriage, has to affirm that marriage will undoubtedly continue.¹ But researchers such as Bernard point us toward a further conclusion, namely, that these changes are not only appropriate, but overdue.²

Women and men are no longer ready to accept pre-defined roles. This means that a large part of the didactic of premarital preparation must center on teaching persons to state clearly what they want then to be able to negotiate for it (what has been called in this paper, "contracting"). It is here that every bit of the pastor's skill as a teacher, counselor, and role model must be brought to bear.

Third, reconstituted families face a wide variety of very complex problems that often are quite different from

¹Jessie Bernard, The Future of Marriage (New York: Bantam, 1973) 301.

²Ibid., 329-330.

the problems faced by other families. The attempt to understand these problems has led me to the conclusion that the necessity to catalogue all those problems is not nearly as great as is the need to be aware of the vast differences between the family system that is presented by a reconstituted family and other family systems. For the pastor doing premarital preparation it is not nearly so important to have all the answers as it is to be open and imaginative in trying various methodologies to break through the false optimism that couples bring with them to help them see clearly that the family system they will be entering will, in all likelihood be quite different from what they imagine. I have found that reciting the litany of statistics or listing the problems that blended families often have is not nearly so important or as effective as sensitive listening and the use of confrontation. As with all counseling, a certain amount of daring may be necessary to get the job done. To ask children, ex-spouses, even ex-in-laws to come into the premarital process may be very threatening to everyone (including the pastor), but it may be required. To work with a family before the wedding--even if it results in the wedding being canceled or postponed--is much more efficient than trying to pick up the pieces after the marriage has taken place.

Once again, this project was undertaken for my benefit. It is offered here in hopes that it will give

other pastors a place to begin as they design their pre-marital preparation with reconstituted families.

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